はけんのこうき アルティーナ
ALTINA
the Sword Princess
覇剣の皇姫
アルティーナ
特装版
V
Yukiya Murasaki
むらさきゆきや
ill. himesuz
ファミ通文庫

# 覇剣の皇姫
# アルティーナ
# V
ALTINA
the Sword Princess

「おおっと」

「てぃやあああああ!!」

戦いになると
周りが見えなくなる
アルティーナは、
フランツィスカに
斬りかかっていた。

本陣テントにて――
クラリスが静かにティーカップを
人数分、テーブルに置いた。
慣れない人がいるので、
まるで機械仕掛けの人形みたいに、
わずかな笑みもこぼさず、
用を済ませた後は壁際へさがってしまう。

はじめまして、マリー・カトル様！
レジス・オーリックの姉、
ヴァネッサ・スミスです。

「レジス、あたしは大丈夫……
あなたが一番だと思うことを
やってちょうだい」

別の意味で冷静さを失いかけたけれど
――ジェロームの発破と、アルティーナの
信頼のおかげで背中を押された。
レジスは深呼吸する。
たとえ風に死の臭いが混じっていようとも、
自分たちが生きるために息をしなければいけない。
みんなを死なせないために。

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# Recap

Regis Auric might be a soldier, but he was ill proficient in horse riding and swordsmanship, and was a bibliophile.

He met a girl with red hair and crimson eyes when he was reassigned to the northern borders.

The girl was actually Beglaria's fourth princess, Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria.
Also known as Altina.

As her mother was a commoner, she was alienated in the palace and was sent to be the border as a commander at the age of fourteen. Though she was not upset about this, she wanted to change the empire because of the citizens who were suffering.

"I need your wisdom if I am to be empress."

Altina shown her strength as a commander and Regis promised to be her strategist despite lacking in self-confidence.

February, the Second Prince, Latreille, who controlled the military, gave an impossible order.

"— to seize fort Volks of Varden Republic and the Germanian federation."

It was simply suicidal to attack the impregnable fortress with such an inferior force.

However, Regis used a stratagem that he once read and guided Altina's army to victory.

April, Altina was to return to the capital Versailles

Although Regis who was with her was excited about seeing the palace in which was the stage in numerous stories, he did not have time to go sight-seeing.

The Second Prince, Latreille, and the First Prince, Auguste, have their own plans to gain the throne. In order to get the throne, Altina who was fourth in line must defeat the two.

While Regis was fooled by them initially, he broke through the situation after seeing through the Latreille and Auguste's plans.

After gaining the cooperation of the New Noble Eleanor, the First Prince Auguste gave up his inheritance rights and expressed his support for Altina to ascend the throne. This resulted in Altina becoming a strong candidate for being the empress.

Belgaria, Empire year 851, 23th April

Belgaria received High Britannia's declaration of war.

The neighbouring Varden also moved against Belgaria.

"I will end the fight by tonight."

Regis proposed his plan of leaving the fort to engage in a swift battle.

# Chapter 1: Flames of War in the Night

Imperial Calendar Year 851, April 30th

Just before the noon bell rang.

In Fort Volk which was built from a mine, soldiers who were wounded, were sent to the large space in front of the fortress' main gate. The new recruits training outside were ambushed by the Duchy's vanguard units.

The area was filled with their groans. There were too many injured and the treatment seemed like it would go well into the night, the more helpers there were, the better.

However, Regis and the others had a different role to fulfil.

Fort Volks, Commander office——

The plain white walls and black pillars in the room caused it to feel rather dull. Not much had changed since it was captured from the Varden Duchy.

After Belgaria's Imperial Army occupied the fort, vases were placed in the corners of the room were decorated with fresh flowers.

However, the scent of the roses was covered by the stench of blood.

Up till now, they were busy helping out with medical treatment, hence explaining the bloodstains on their clothes.

In the middle of the room was a long table. Seated at the innermost position, the commander— Altina sighed.

"For this to actually happen……"

Opposite of her was Jerome, who leaned his large and heavy body on the chair, threatening to bend it.

Apparently, only an experienced general was able to remain this calm. He did not even bother to wipe the bloodstains off his uniform.

"Hmph…… Do all of you need to be so depressed over some recruits dying?"

"This isn't about the numbers, being recruits or veterans. We lost our comrades alright?"

"Will the sigh of the princess bring back the dead? Leave that to their families. Gather your spirit and do your role if you wish to prevent more casualties."

"Uh……Even knowing that, I……"

For Altina who was only fourteen, it was necessary to gather her thoughts after such a tragedy had happened.

Jerome frowned and his sight shifted to the side.

"You too, Regis! How long are you going to show that pale face?!"

"A-ah…… Sorry……"

Even Regis had participated in a war before and seen numerous injured soldiers.

However, it was his first time encountering unexpected casualties after his appointment as a strategist.

Out of all the possibilities, did he make the most appropriate decision? The dead seemed to be accusing him like this, making it hard for him to breathe.

A firm hand rested upon his shoulder.

It belongs to Evrard who was sitting beside him.

He was a knight that was over forty years of age. His features were his thick beard and bald head. With his large build, he looked just like a bear.

Before, he used to be a captain of a knight order. Now he was the captain responsible for the defense of the fort.

"Sir Regis, this is a battlefield and we are soldiers. Everyone is prepared to die, so please do not carry too much of a burden alone."

"…… Thank you…… I'm fine."

*I can't afford not to be fine.*

*If I don't do it, there will be more death. I can't just lower my head and stare at the grains on the table.*

Regis regulated his breathing.

He surveyed the Commander's office.

Altina was sitting to the left of Regis.

The energetic girl with a beauty appearance that could shame the palace's beauties, was wearing a pained expression.

Beside her was her bodyguard, Eric. Being a young knight at the age of sixteen, he lacked battle experience and was as pale as Regis when he saw the large number of casualties.

Eddie and Prince Auguste were sitting to the left of them.

Eddie was not just a renowned swordsman, but also the current head of Balzac.

"Although I hate killing, I'm proficient in close combat. Do despatch me to fight in places you deem fit."

Even in Belgaria, where there were many powerful veterans, his swordsmanship was outstanding.

His words made Regis relax a little.

The First Prince Auguste, for a certain reason, gave up his inheritance rights before the king. Hence, he was no longer a candidate to take up the throne.

That was the story made known to the public.

In actuality, Auguste's real identity was his sister, Princess Felicia.

In this fort, only the seven people currently in the commander's office and two maids knew about this.

If Auguste's real identity was leaked, it would have an opposite effect when she expressed support for Altina. In addition, she would also be charged for lying to the king.

To hide her identity Felicia, continued to act as Auguste and used his status to stay here as a guest.

She had a gloomy expression and looked quite depressed. Usually she was not lively, but now she was even more dispirited.

"…… Is my mother…… fine?"

Eddie consoled her.

"She will be fine. The Trouin Family not only have their army, the Second Imperial Army is there too."

Felicia's father was the emperor, while her mother was the second consort, Catherine, who hailed from the Trouin Family.

Trouin's territory was located in the west of the empire, which happened to be the area which was attacked by the enemy.

According to the intelligence Regis had,

On the 23rd morning, seven days ago, on the west coast, the port city of Chaineboule came under attack and had fallen.

The enemy was a High Britannian steamship.

Equipped with the most advanced cannons, the larger version of the Type 41 Elswick Cannon had increased firepower and range.

Meanwhile, Belgaria only had sailboats.

Hence, the naval battle was hopeless for Belgaria.

*The vanguard of ten thousand had already landed. There should be more of them by now.*

On the afternoon of 23th April, the Second Imperial Army marched to intercept the invaders.

*Seven days had past, the battle should have concluded.*

*It would be nice if they were repelled.*

According to Regis' speculation, it was likely that Belgaria lost terribly.

The Second Imperial Army was not prepared to fight off a foreign invasion. Their march towards the west was a political move and their numbers did not even reach ten thousand.

On the other hand, the High Britannian Army had prepared the newest model of guns and cannons. There were also weapons and protective gears made from their newly developed metal.

Belgaria's soldiers were veterans, but those battles used bows and spears

While the enemy specifically prepared the latest type of guns.

Regis cut of his train of thoughts.

“Other than the Second Imperial Army in the west, the Empire will definitely send reinforcements. Since the request for reinforcements has reached the northern borders, those armies who are closer should have reached the west.”

He could only console her.

“I see……”

Felicia nodded.

In Belgaria, the military power was in the emperor’s hand.

However, the emperor, Liam, was already old and no longer able to take to the frontlines. Hence, the second prince Latreille commanded the Belgaria’s military in his stead.

And Latreille’s command was ‘*send half of your force to the west as reserves and be on standby*’.

Regis reconsidered the situation.

“Although Belgaria waged wars in many directions, about half of them were small skirmishes centered around strategic locations…… However, High Britannia sent a powerful force and invaded on a grand scale. At the very least, General Latreille recognised that their intent was to conquer our lands. I agree with him as well.”

Altina agreed by nodding her head.

The others were quietly listening to Regis’ analysis.

“There is quite some distance between the western region and Fort Volks. Even if we dispatched our army, I do not know whether we would make it on time. Which was why General Latreille ordered our force to act as reserves. From the military viewpoint, this is not an urgent issue…”

“Military viewpoint?”

Regis replied to Altina who tilted her head.

“But from a political standpoint, this is important and there is a need to act urgently. This is because Your Highness and Prince Latreille are fighting over the inheritance rights.”

“So that’s it. In other words, whoever fares better against High Britannia, the more support they will have?”

“Simply put, you are correct. Although I do not know whether half of the border regiment will be able to change the tide of war…… We must avoid an embarrassing situation in which we don’t participate in the war.”

Altina showed an unhappy look.

“I also agree that we should move quickly, but not because of political reasons! I wish to genuinely lend a helping hand when my allies desperately need it.”

“That’s true……”

Altina was too kind and there were times when she was stubborn like a child. That was precisely why Regis wanted to make her the ruler.

“In any case, that concludes the situation regarding High Britannia in the west…… Next is about the Army of the Grand Duchy of Varden that is approaching this fort. We cannot send any forces to the west without dealing with this first.”

“The soldiers will not be able to concentrate if they have to worry about their back while on the move.”

Not just Altina, Jerome raised his opinion

“How can we just let them go after getting attacked! Those imbeciles who dare to challenge us, I will let them regret it in hell!”

Although he was usually unrefined with his choice of words, it was rare to see him showing his anger.

On the surface, he did not seem to care about the recruits, but deep down, he was thinking about his subordinates and was unable to suppress his anger.

Regis picked several stratagems from the books he read before. Next was the gathering of information before finalizing the plan.

As there was a war, the Commander’s office door was open.

A soldier came running to the door and saluted them by raising his right hand to his left chest before reporting loudly.

“Report! The enemy is approaching from the zone B4! Three thousand infantry!”

“That route, is it…… Are they equipped with the new guns and cannons?”

“Not all of the enemy, only some of them are equipped with the new weapons.”

After that, two more soldiers came running.

“Enemy spotted at zone B3! Two thousand infantry!”

“Report! Two thousand enemy infantry at zone G5! They brought along their cannons!”

The scouts that were sent out for reconnaisse came back reporting one after another. Hearing these, Regis placed the yellow flags which represented the enemy on the map.

Altina’s expression was dark.

“That is a lot of them, moreover, they are trying to surround us?”

“Looks like they placed all the mercenaries together. That is probably why most of them didn’t carry the new firearms. After all, mercenaries wouldn’t use a weapon they are not familiar with.”

“However, experienced mercenaries are also powerful.”

“Even so, they would quickly withdraw when they are at a disadvantage. It’s alright, the battle will end tonight.”

“It is better to end it quickly, but really…? Ah!!”

Altina had an expression of unease for a moment, but looked over with a serious face after shaking her head.

“I believe in Regis! Please tell us. How we should proceed?”

Jerome stood up.

“Let me hear your plan, Regis! I will say it up front, I do not want any flaws in it. I want them beaten to the point they would think twice about attacking!”

Evrard puffed his chest up.

“It is for this day that we trained our soldiers. Please command us!”

“I will definitely protect Her Highness!”

Eric also stood out.

Eddie and Felicia who were sitting at the side were also looking at Regis.

*Being looked by them makes me want to retreat without hesitation. It can’t be help, I don’t really have the confidence.*

*Even so, the intelligence that will decide the battle has been obtained.*

Regis pointed at the map which was on the table.

“The enemy believe that they can attack the fort with the new cannons, which is why they brought them along.”

Altina raised her hand.

“Regis, there are also new cannons in this fort…”

“Although it could be a little technical, Fort Volk’s cannons are Type 38 Elswick Cannon, while the cannons the enemy brought seems to be new Type 41. Be it range or power, those are better.”

“In that case, wouldn’t the enemy have the advantage?”

“That is so in terms of range and power…… However, those cannons should have flaws too.”

Altina had a puzzled look.

That goes the same for the others. After all, the performance were inferior, thus they were puzzled by what he meant.

Regis continued explaining.

“While the Type 41 is stronger, it was originally used in steamships. The mobility will slow down when travelling on land. From the investigation reports, the Varden Duchy will be setting up their formation in front of the fort tonight…We still have some time to prepare, and that is an advantage for us… Furthermore, the enemy is likely to rely on the cannons to attack, if this advantage was gone, I believe they will lose their morale and retreat.”

“I understand that we have the advantage because of their slow movement speed…… But isn’t their cannon better? What shall we do?”

The furrowed brow of Altina seemed to have the words ‘I don’t understand’ written there. She might be making such a face, but there wasn’t any gloom in her beautiful features and instead felt really cute.

Jerome knocked on the table.

“Trickery again! It is likely that the enemy will be using the high performance cannons. However, you want to overcome their advantage… What are you planning?!”

“A plan for a night battle, I already informed those on duty to prepare. Sir Jerome is to lead the troops in pursuit…”

Altina suddenly brought her face closer to Regis.

“I'll go too!”

“Rejected, it is better for Your Highness to stay in the fort…”

“People will lose confidence in me if I did such cowardly acts. I do not wish to be the kind of commander who hides in a hole!”

“Ah……”

What she said was true. Most of the soldiers here were experiencing their first war.

They did not witness the duel between Jerome and Altina.

Even if the regulars were spreading the words, were the recruits to personally see Jerome during battle, then they would lean towards him.

It would be hard to maintain their organization if the commander’s influence declines.

“Even so… It’s a night battle.”

“There is no meaning in me going, when there is no danger, Regis!”

“Well…… It can’t be helped. Regarding what you said… No, I shall respect your decision, Your Highness.”

Regis had been calling her Altina, just like a friend, because she wished for it. Though most of the people here already knew that…

Knights on their prime like Evrard respect Altina and called her a goddess.

It was true that Altina was indeed beautiful. Moreover, her slender white arms had unbelievable strength. Any respectable soldier seeing the young and beautiful princess swinging her giant sword would be mystified, but not find it unbelievable.

In front of devotees like Evrard, calling the princess by her nickname and not using honorifics was a big problem.

More importantly, they do not know when the scouts will report back. If the soldiers were to misunderstand their relation, it would affect their morale. After all, Regis was a commoner despite being the strategist, while Altina was an imperial princess.

“Understood, Your Highness…… Then, this will be the formation.”

Regis placed a red flag onto the map.

It was the area outside of Fort Volks.

The plan was for them to leave the safe impregnable fortress in order to risk a swift and dangerous battle.

“Is it really fine, Your Highness?”

Regis asked.

Altina clenched her fist.

“We are moving! We will be breaking through the Duchy’s army tonight, after which we will head west!”

It was a moonless night.

The clattering of the armours of the Army of Varden's Grand Duchy's could be heard from afar.

They were positioning themselves at the edge of the forest which was outside the range of Fort Volks' cannons.

It was the same position Regis took when they took down the fort two months ago.

However, Regis only had a force of two thousand, while the cannons were the smaller and older model.

Based on the reports, the Varden Duchy have a force of twenty thousand and prepared twenty Type 41 Elswick Cannons.

Just the main force right in front of them numbered four thousand.

It was a grand army.

About 10 Ar (715m) away from the Duchy's army.

Regis and the rest were hiding in the forest.

They were only a force of two hundred.

If they were spotted, they would be surrounded and destroyed.

That might be so, but the plan would be compromised if soldiers setting up the ambush were discovered. Increasing the number of soldiers would only increase the risk. Hence, a small number was best suited for this.

Even when Regis learnt all that from books he read…He still felt fear creeping in his skin.

It was as if a knife was pressing on his neck.

It was cold enough to freeze his body, but his palms were sweating.

Even though it was April, it was still cold in the night as they were in a northern country. Luckily, there was no wind blowing in the forest.

From the side, Altina closed her eyes and was patiently waiting for the signal.

"……"

Hanging on her waist was Grand Tonnerre Quatre which was larger than her. It was one of the seven treasure swords of the founding emperor, L'Empereur Flamme. It was 26 Pa(192cm) long and the silver blade was kept within the sheath.

The battle have yet to start.

Beside her was Eric, who have blended into the darkness and one could barely see his silhouette.

It was that dark during the moonless night.

Eddie also joined the battle as a bodyguard. If the battle would go as planned, he would not get his turn to perform…

Naturally, Felicia was in the fortress.

After all, she could not fight. Among the royalties, be it Altina, Latreille or Bastian, they all have extraordinary strength. However, Felicia was not gifted with such powers and was no different from any other girls.

Evrard was commanding the fortress defense corps. Although he was stationed in a safer location, he still played an important role in this battle.

Jerome who was leading five hundred soldiers was hidden closest to the enemy. Despite the small number, they were all elites.

The troop closest to the enemy plays the most crucial role. They were close enough to even hear the snoring of the enemy.

If they were discovered, the plan would fail.

As if they were walking on a tightrope.

They were worried about the enemy hearing their heartbeat and breathing

*It has yet to begin?*

Regis took out a pocket watch.

Although it was a moonless night, the stars allowed one to see things on their hand.

Regis used the faint lighting that was partially blocked by the leaves to look at the watch.

"It's time…"

A sound broke the silent night.

Fort Volks, which was built upon a mine, began firing their cannons through the cannon opening.

This alerted the enemy who were setting up their formation.

Half of them were surprised, while the other were mocking their foes.

They cannot hit us.

The cannons in Fort Volks were once theirs were the old model. They understood the performance of the cannons very well.

At this distance, they would not be hit no matter how many times they fired. At best, the cannon could hit the area before the Varden Duchy's main forces. That should be the case.

Regis then confirmed his victory in the darkness.

The sounds of explosion rang.

It did not come from the centre but from the forest.

It came from the back of the Varden's Grand Duchy's main force.

Pillars of fire could be seen.

Amongst the enemy troops, there definitely were not many who understood what happened right away.

Fort Volks' cannons definitely could not hit the forest.

However, the pillars of fire were behind them.

The sound of cannons firing could still be heard from the fort.

This time, the explosion occurred at the right side of their formation.

Groans and wailing could be heard.

It was in Germanian.

"Commander, it's the cannons! The cannons from the fort hit us!"

"Impossible! This shouldn't be happening, we are outside the range of Type 38 Cannons!"

"H-However!"

Another explosion occurred behind them once more. This time, it was even closer to them.

In this situation, the experienced mercenaries would no longer be waiting for any order to come.

Since they were already within the range of the cannons, their options were to either retreat or attack. Since there was no order to attack, the mercenaries began withdrawing.

Some mercenaries began escaping from the crescent moon formation of their units.

The Varden's commander was probably thinking 'Attack from such range was impossible.'

Regis, who was not a god, did not know what was the opponent thinking. However, it was alright, as the commander's intelligence means nothing to the soldiers who were in fear.

No matter how excellent the commander was, it would be hard for him to control the army once there were deserters.

The cannons that should not hit them had struck them. In this situation, they should began retreating out of the cannons' range. That was a standard procedure.

They should escape and hide in the forest.

In such a situation, the enemy commander had no choice but to issue a retreat as to prevent the army from scattering.

"Retreat! Take cover in the forest!"

"Understood!! All units, to the forest…!!"

The faithful regular soldiers who awaited for the commander to issue a command also began to run towards the forest as though some restriction was lifted.

The firing of the cannons from Fort Volks had gotten more intense.

The area outside the forest was getting bombarded.

The soldiers could not help but think about escaping to somewhere further away from there.

Black beasts were hiding in the direction they were running to.

The ferocious beasts were unleashed at that moment.

Commanding five hundred elites, Jerome let loose a warcry and drew his sword out.

Even if the enemy was four thousand, they were frantically escaping in the wild and were unorganised. Furthermore, the enemy did not even think that the Empire would set up an ambush in the forest.

It was a one-sided battle.

Jerome and the Beilschmidt Border Regiment soldiers under his command had white cloths tied to their right sword arm. This was so that the soldiers could see his own raised hand before slashing down the sword.

They also used whistles to confirm each other's positions.

Thanks to that, the empire soldiers could recognise one another in the dark, thus preventing friendly-fire and maintain teamwork.

In contrast, the Varden's Army only considered a long term siege battle. Hence, they were unprepared for a night battle.

To call the enemy commander incompetent was too harsh. Having hired expensive mercenaries, preparing for a night battle that had a low probability of happening was unrealistic.

The pillars of fire brightened up the forest.

The enemy also began to attack back since they could now see, however more than half have already began running in other directions.

It was natural as they were ambushed at a place where commands were hard to reach. They would lose, even their chance to escape if they continue to remain there.

Altina who was still nervous said, "Up till now, the plan seems successful, Regis."

"Yeah… The sound and flashes of cannons firing blanks were in sync with the explosions set off by our engineers near the enemy formation."

"Even so, it's no wonder that they thought the cannons hit them."

"If it wasn't night time, they should have discovered the boxes of gunpowder used for this trick…"

Scouts came to the headquarters where Regis was at.

"Varden's main force is now heading northwest!"

"Hmm, just like what the books said… It would be hard to predict their movement if they were led by a commander. However, within such chaos, they will make similar judgement and move without thinking much."

Under their own judgement, the soldiers who were escaping, would only run towards the Grand Duchy of Varden. This was human psychology. Once a human was in danger, most of them would run towards their home or escape together with others.

Regis had already deployed an ambushing unit where the enemy was heading.

The enemy would be gradually cut down and captured under the successive attacks.

To the Varden's Grand Duchy Army, the scene might look like them being engulfed by the Belgarian imperial soldiers.

The outcome was gradually determined.

To Regis, it was fine to let those normal soldiers escape.

However, Beilschmidt Border Regiment had to dispatch half of their force towards the west. Be it Altina or Jerome, both had to leave for the expedition.

The fort's defence would be weakened.

If they wanted to temporarily prevent the Grand Duchy of Varden from regaining their strength to attack, then they had to achieve a great victory here.

While it was understandable, Regis still sighed.

"Ha…… No matter what, I am not used to pursuing the enemy."

"Even for me, I'm not fond of chasing after the enemy. That said, aren't things a little too successful?"

Despite knowing there was an ambush ahead, there were some brave souls that escaped towards the opposite directions from the main group. Hence, the main unit was also engaged in battle, but not to the point where Altina had to join in.

It seemed that it was settled by Eddie's unit who was responsible for the front.

"Well … Isn't that good? Even if we had a night battle in the forest, we won't be able to see the other soldiers."

"Regis? Could it be that… You already knew this would have happened,hence setting up this formation?"

"Isn't it common sense not to let the king enter the forefront of the battle?"

Regis replied softly such that the guards around could not hear it.

Altina had a dissatisfied look.

"I got deceived by Regis again!"

"Not really."

"Liar!"

"Aren't we deployed outside the fortress? Also, do not let your guard down, as it is not totally safe here."

"!!"

Altina opened her eyes

She drew the large sword which was hanging at her waist.

As the new scabbard could be opened from the middle, not much effort was required to draw the sword out.

The blade was drawn out.

Altina then thrust the sword.

Regis was about to be executed—— Not.

The sword that was thrusted past by Regis' nose and struck something in the darkness.

Sound of metal colliding could be heard.

Something had fallen near Regis' legs.

It was an arrow.

Phew~ Sound of whistling could be heard, which was out of place in a bloody battlefield.

It came from the top of a tree.

Like a monkey, someone came down by slipping from branches to branches.

Was it a child? The small body made people have such thoughts.

A voice belonging to a female said, "Not bad! I can't believe that you actually blocked the arrow which came so suddenly in the darkness."

It was in Germanian.

Altina readied her posture and replied in the language of Belgaria

"It is not that sudden if it came from the front! Furthermore, one would get used to the darkness after staying here for so long."

Regis was still not used to the darkness despite staying here for so long. Neither did he realised an arrow was flying towards him.

Either Altina was too outstanding or Regis was just useless. Those were the only two possible answer.

The enemy slowly emerged from the shadow of the tree.

The starlight shone upon her.

She was holding a small crossbow with a quiver on her back.

Apparently, the enemy was a young girl.

Even so, the girl had a bold attitude.

Even when the heavy infantry who were protecting Altina drew their swords, her expression did not change.

"Ahahaha! Belgaria's princess sure is interesting!"

"Even though you are at the centre of the enemy formation, you are still so calm?"

“Of course! After all, I won’t lose.”

The girl flicked her braided hair back and smiled happily. She was not putting on a facade, she was just that confident.

There was a silver accessory on her.

Under the starlight, one could vaguely see the accessory, it was an upside down fox..

Regis then remembered something he read from the past.

“Could it be that she is from the mercenary group, Renard Pendu?”

“Oh?” After saying that, the girl shifted her sight to Regis.

“You are quite knowledgeable. Or could it be that we are quite famous?”

“Who are they?!”

It seemed that Altina did not know who they were, which was not surprising.

“It’s a mercenary group that accomplished great war merits in the Germania Federation. It was said that they were participating in the northern civil war right now…”

“It’s not that we pulled out of the civil war. It’s just that the rewards here is higher due to the stalemate. Thanks to you capturing the fort, our work has increased. In any case, I would have earn lots of money by killing you, Your Highness.”

“Stupid! Isn’t that like selling the bear’s skin before killing it?”

“Ahahaha! My brother often said ‘Do not celebrate what a great day it is before the day ends’. Are you my brother or what?”

“I don’t even know your brother!”

“My brother, Gilbert, is really handsome!”

In the book that Regis read, Gilbert was also quite famous.

Renard Pendu’s leader, Gilbert Schweinzeberg was also known as King of Mercenary.

It was said that be it a duel or group battle, he had never lost. He was even good in negotiating.

He seemed to be one-eyed and used a trident

“That’s your brother? In other words, you are the sister, Jessica?”

“Aa, that’s my elder sister. I’m the second sister, Franziska. That reminds me, you seems to know me quite well. Perhaps you are my fan? Do you want a handshake? Ahaha!”

While laughing, she reloaded the crossbow.

The crossbow was now ready to fire.

The crossbow that Franziska used was the pull lever type, rather than the power, the main point was its ability to shoot consecutively.

The arrows used were short too.

Before the arrows were shot, Altina dashed forward.

“What can a crossbow do at this distance!”

Even though some of the guards were heavy infantry, Altina ignored them and dashed forward.
*Perhaps there is a need to talk to her about the rationale of stationing guards.*

While Altina thrust her sword.

Regis shouted.

“There are enemies on the tree!”

One should consider that there were still others when only Franziska came down from the tree. Hence, one should take into account that possibility when thinking.

As expected, an arrow came flying from the tree.

Altina forcefully pulled her sword back and used it as a shield to block the arrow.

Soon after that, arrows also flew towards Regis.

Just when he was about to get shot, Eric came with a large shield and protected Regis.

“Are you alright, Sir Regis?!”

“I’m fine, Eric. I will leave the princess to you too!”

“Understood!”

A few heavy infantry guards were injured by the arrows.

In the darkness, it was difficult to block such long-distance attack. However, none of them abandoned the commander to take cover.

“To battle! Protect Her Highness! Let them witness the Imperial soldiers’ prowess!”

“Oh!!!”

Altina who was unaware of the surrounding after attacking swung her sword down as to slash Franziska.

“Yeeaaaah!!”

“Oops.”

Franziska easily dodged it.

She was that agile.

Although Altina’s sword seemed slow, one requires large movement to actually dodge it. It was not something that could be easily avoided.

Moreover, they were in a dark forest..

“This sure is tough! It seems that coming here is the right choice. Not only did I met a fun opponent, there is also a reward for killing the Belgaria’s princess!”

“It’s not that easy!”

Someone shouted while waving his sword.

Eric thrust his sword towards the area in which Franziska retreated.

“Ha!”

“What?! Don’t be a hindrance!”

Franziska avoided the attack by lowering her body mere inches from the ground.

At the same time, she fired the arrow.

“Argh?!”

Eric stopped his movement instantly.

*Ah!*

The cold sweat that Regis hate started dripping down his back.

Altina turned her head and shouted the knight’s name.

However, Eric did not reply.

He had fallen to the ground.

“Is there anyone there?! Come quickly!”

Regis shouted for help.

The soldiers wanted to help were stopped by the arrows that were coming from the tree. Even the area near Regis was shot.

Regis quickly went and hide under a tree as he realised he would only cause more trouble by coming out.

*As expected of a famous mercenary group, to be able to shoot with just the starlight and sound of the enemy.*
*As expected of a famous mercenary group, they recruited really capable members*

Belgaria’s soldiers were not that weak to be suppressed by the shooting for long. Countless arrows were fired at the tree which they deemed the enemy was.

Screams could be heard.

Following that, three people fell to the ground.

They could not confirm whether all the enemy was shot down as nothing could be seen, but the allied soldiers could tend to Eric.

*Please stay alive, Eric* — Regis could only pray.

Altina was still fighting against Franziska.

As both of them were close together, no one dared to fire their guns and arrows.

In addition, those who dare to approach might be cut by Altina's large sword.

"How dare you!!!"

"Too slow!"

Franziska lowered herself and avoided the strike.

Normally, one could not counterattack in this posture and could only defend. However, her weapon was a crossbow.

Just by pulling the trigger, one can attack faster than a knight.

"I will be taking the bear's skin!"

Like a huge needle, the arrow was fired.

The arrow approached Altina's right eye.

Her beautiful crimson hair was swaying in the forest.

"What?!"

Altina turned her head to the side and avoided the arrow right beside her cheek.

"Impossible?!"

"This time for sure!!"

However, one cannot use the crossbow without reloading no matter how it was designed to shoot continuously.

"Ke……"

Franziska then retreated.

Knowing that the enemy was not counterattacking, Altina swung her large sword down as she pressed forward.

The strike was curved.

And was targeted at Franziska's waist.

Just before she was hit, Franziska jumped.

"Ahahaha!"

"Eeh!?"

Franziska's left hand was holding onto the crossbow while she used her right hand to grab onto a tree branch.

As if a bird escaped into the sky, she hang onto the tree as to avoid the assault.

The fierce strike hit the tree trunk.

“Argh!!”

Altina looked stunned.

The impact from hitting the tree trunk hurt her hands, and the sword was stuck in the tree.

Franziska turned her body that was hanging in the air by using only her right hand. At the same time, the lever was pulled. Once she landed, she took arrows from the quiver and reloaded the crossbow.

“Ahaha! Isn’t today a day that will decide my bright future!”

Altina tried to pull the sword out.

She managed to pull out the sword and made a large crack in the tree.

A clattering sound could heard.

It was a strange sound.

Altina thought that it was the tree that broke, but that was not the case.

The hilt of her Grand Tonnerre Quatre was bent.

The night sky prevented her to see it clearly, but it was obvious that the sword was bent in a weird angle. Altina stabbed the sword into the ground.

*The sword was broken?!*

“I-impossible……”

Altina widen her eyes as she said it weakly.

Franziska took that opportunity to fire her arrows.

Seeing that, Regis thought his heart was going to stop.

A man in black clothes managed to prevent a hopeless situation.

Eddie Fabio de Balzac.

He had wide shoulders and a tattered cloak was draped over his black military uniform.

The weapon that blocked the incoming arrow was the Defendre Sept. It was a wide blade with a comb-shaped notch engraved on its back.

“Hey, Altina, are you fooling around?”

“I-I’m not fooling around!”

“Then, is it that you lack killing intent?”

“Argh…”

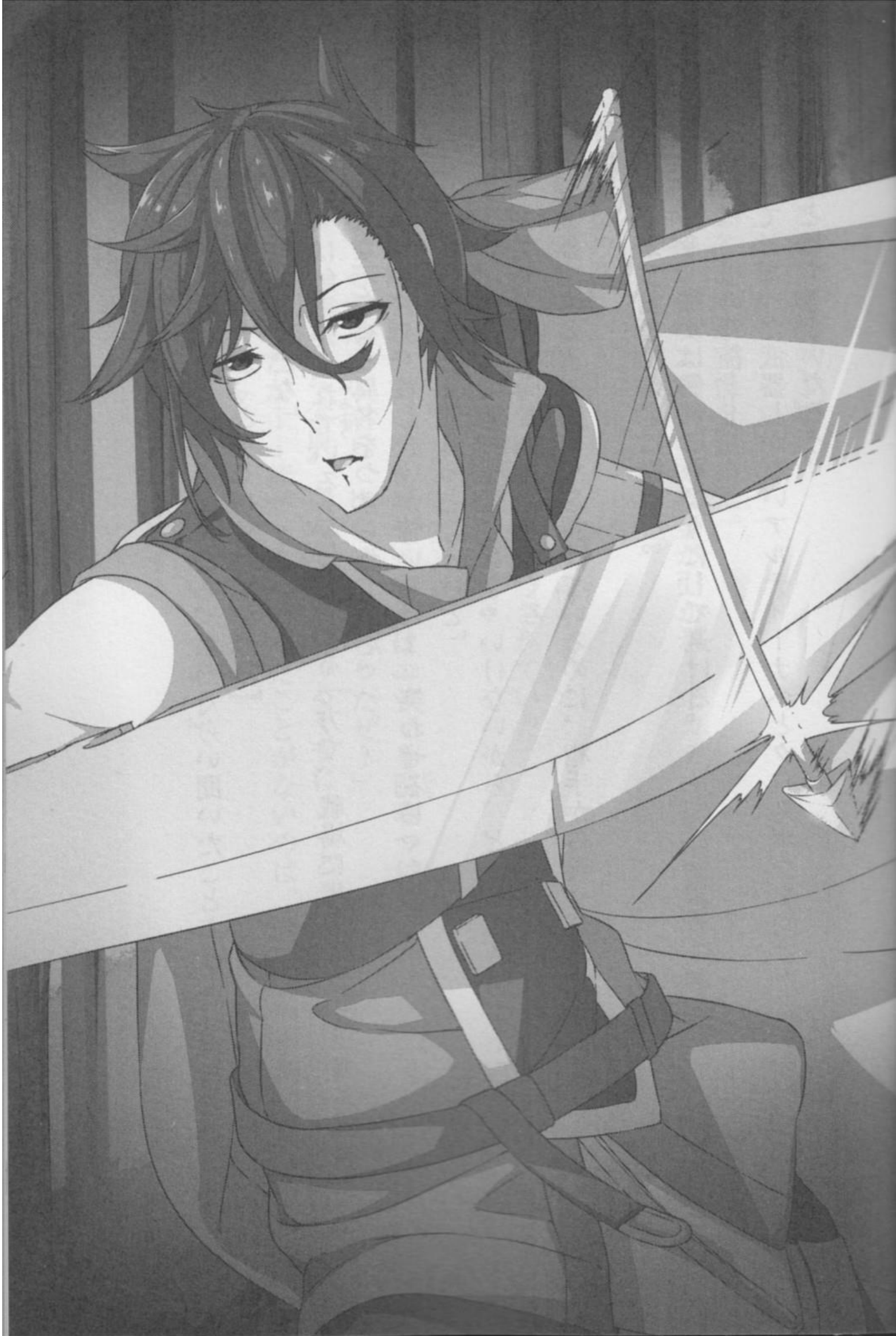
As they were known each other since young, they were not that formal with each other.

Eddie readied his sword while facing the opponent as to protect Altina.

Although Franziska had reloaded her weapon, she did not act rashly as she realised that the person before her was someone with considerable power.

“You…… Who are you?!”

“I’m from the Balzac house. If you are a mercenary, you should have heard of my name before.”



“Hmm, so you are the ‘Lazy Duke’?”

“Looks like there are bad rumours about me.”

Despite his excellent swordsmanship, he never injured his opponent on the battleground before. This was why he had such a infamous title.

“What? Aren’t you inviting others to laugh at you just because you hate fighting?”

“Well, I suppose you’re right…… Even so, it’s a little wrong.”

“As for me, I have to kill the princess over there, so get out of my way!”

Franziska shortened the distance between them.

It was unexpected for the opponent to shorten the distance when her choice of weapon was capable of long distance attack.

Eddie swung his sword horizontally.

Reacting to this, she bent down.

Her target was the person behind Eddie.

She aimed her crossbow at Altina who was holding the broken sword. Without her sword, Altina could not even defend.

“This time for sure, my bear skin!”

“Ku…?”

Altina was stunned.

The enemy pulled the trigger, producing a metallic sound.

However, the arrow did not shoot out.

“What’s going on?!”

Franziska looked at her hand and was shocked.

Her crossbow string was slashed.

The only time she could think of where this might have happened was the clash earlier.

“Y-you..?!”

Franziska glared at Eddie after distancing herself.

“Pardon me, but as the crossbow was too dangerous, can you allow me to destroy that?”

“How can that be! Even though you are called the Lazy Duke…… Exactly what is going on?!”

“Looks like it’s a misunderstanding…… The reason why I did not injured anyone was not because I’m afraid of a fight. It’s just that I dislike killing my opponent.”

“W-what that is that suppose to mean?! Don’t joke with me!”

Franziska’s face redden from rage as she grinded her teeth.

Seeing that the enemy lost her weapon, the heavy infantry rushed over.

“Capture her!”

“Surround her! Do not let her escape!”

“Schisse(shit)! These damn little shits!”

Franziska pushed off the ground.

The infantry slowly closed in and swung their sword. However, it looked like them coordinating with her sword dance, missing her.

Without a sword or a shield, she could only dodge with a crossbow in hand. This was not something an ordinary person could do.

If it was daytime, they could use guns to fire upon her back. In fact, they could even do it at night.

Slipping past the heavy infantry encirclement, Franziska entered into the darkness and disappeared.

Out of frustration, arrows were let loose. However, what could be heard was her angry voice.

“Next time, I will kill you for sure, Your Highness! You too, Duke Balzac!”

What resounded in the forest sounds like a witch’s curse.

Eddie kept his sword back into the scabbard.

“If possible, I do not want to meet her again.”

Regis ordered the troops to move as their location was discovered.

After that, he went to find Eric who was undergoing treatment.

* * *

Fort Volk, Infirmary.

Wearing a white outfit with glasses, coupled with her neat short hair. She was one of the rare female military doctor within the empire.

“This is going to leave a scar.”

“… I’m… still alive.”

Eric who was lying on the bed mumbled while staring at the ceiling.

His surrounding was separated by white curtains.

This was thanks to the female doctor. Eric was just a fifth grade combat officer, just a noncommissioned officer. Originally, he should be lying on a cloth on the floor and receive treatment at the field hospital.

His left shoulder was bandaged firmly, though he could move his elbow.

Gradually, he could feel his fingers getting numbed.

At that time, he raised his shield too late, causing the arrow to bypass his defense.

The result was his left shoulder getting shot.

If the arrow was a little more to the right, it would be the heart.

The female doctor had gone on to treat the other patients.

“It’s because we obtained victory. You sure are lucky. If it’s a defeat, it might delay your treatment and you might die.”

“… So we won…… What about Her Highness?”

“Although she is a little depressed, she only had some bruises.”

“Is that so… That’s great… Really…”

Eric sighed in relief.

As a guard, this was more important than anything else.

“Not just Sir Evrard, even Her Highness and Sir Regis were worried about you and visited you. As they might hear that thing about your body, I chased them out before treating you. Since you are awake, do you have anything to say to them?”

“… There is no need…… They have to set off towards the west in the morning. Looks like I can’t go…… As such, they do not need waste their precious time on a useless person like me…”

“Hey! Something like useless is… Well, I guess that is fine too.”

The female doctor put aside the conversation and proceeded to the other patients.

Eric used his right hand to cover his eyes.

At the same time, he grinded his teeth.

Even his head was bandaged.

His eyes felt painful, but they were heating up for another reason.

“Ugh… Uuurg…”

Although the female doctor heard it, she pretended that she did not notice it and continue treating others.

After some time, “Hm, Isn’t this Sir Regis?”

The female doctor’s voice could be heard beyond the curtains.

Regis’ voice could also be heard.

“It’s been tough on you, good job.”

“……”

Eric’s body went stiff.

As a bodyguard, he should be disappointed in me for not even capable of being Her Highness’ shield— Was what Eric thought. He even hesitated to show his face to Regis.

Eric stayed still under the blanket.

The female doctor asked a question.

“Is there anything important, Sir Regis?”

“As the sky is going to brighten soon, I’m thinking of setting off.”

“Ahh, is it time for this already? I’m terribly sorry that you have and fetch me personally. Is it really fine for you not to sleep?”

“Aside from Her Highness and Sir Jerome, it should be fine regarding the soldiers as those who participated in the night battle are not involved in the expedition. I am very sorry that you could not get any sleep.”

“You should worry more about yourself, Sir Regis. After all, I can sleep on the carriage.”

“Haha… I’m also on the carriage.”

“Now you mention it, that is true.”

“How’s Eric?”

Eric gulped as his name was mentioned.

After a moment of silence, the female doctor replied that Eric was still asleep.

“Is that so…”

“You can’t bring him along. Just healing the wound require a month while recovering his strength will required two.”

“Ahhh, I understand. It’s just that, I wanted to express my gratitude.”

“Gratitude, is it? For charging towards the enemy and got shot— Not these words, right?”

“Before he was injured, Eric protected me. If not for him, the one lying on the bed could be me…”

“I see. As Sir Regis did not wear any armour, you could be lying inside a coffin.”

“Well, that is possible too.”

“Though, it could lighten my workload.”

“Ha-haha…… Although it might be bad saying this, but it is better than increasing the work for priests…”

“How about wearing light armour?”

“That is not an option either. If a strategist wore armour, won’t that mean that the strategist is worried that the enemy might attack the main formation…? It looks as if the strategist have no confidence in their own plans.”

“Is that really the case?”

“…… Actually, I can’t stand up after wearing an armour.”

“How weak!”

“Haha… That… In any case, I wanted to thanks Eric, but I don't want to wake him up. Though, is it fine to leave a letter here?”

“How about doing so after you come back? I feel that it is best saying this face to face.”

“I see… Let's go with that then. In that case, doctor, please head towards the hall at the first floor after you are done preparing.”

“Got it.”

After saying goodbye, Regis’ footstep gradually got softer.

The female doctor drew open the curtain.

Eric sniffled.

“Uuhh……”

“Well, you saw the person you wanted to meet, so don’t be too depressed.”

“……Yes… I won’t.”

“I have to follow Her Highness. I will leave the rest to my assistant. You have to listen to him and recover before Sir Regis return.”

Her gentle tone was even rare to the female doctor herself.
Eric withheld his tears and said.

“……Nn… I … want to… become stronger… and properly fulfill my duty…”

The female doctor did not say anything and just messed with his hair.

# Chapter 2: Sister of the Bibliophile

**Part 1**

Morning, the residue heat of the battlefield had yet to disperse.

The Beilschmidt Border Regiment marched past the gate of Fort Volk and began their expedition.

Regis was on a carriage.

Altina who was the commander was riding a chestnut horse. The mane and tail were golden while its left hind leg was white. This smart horse was gifted to her when they were in the capital.

*That reminds me, is the horse named yet?*

Jerome's black horse was at the side. He was once the commander, now he was the captain of the five hundred black knights.

The cavalry was at the forefront while behind them were one thousand infantry, two thousand mercenaries and five hundred soldiers for transporting supplies.

As it was an expedition, speed was the most important factor, which was why they did not bring along any cannons. It was judged that there was no point if the cannons they brought along could not hit the enemy.

At the centre of the formation, there were four horses pulling a beautiful white carriage. It was large enough for six people to face each other. It could be said that it was a portable command room.

Currently, only Regis and Clarisse were on it.

Although they were heading towards a battlefield, it was peaceful as they are still within Belgaria.

Looking out of the window, one could see blinding light reflecting from the walls of Fort Volk.

Clarisse gently touched the window.

As it was cold outside the carriage, the place where her fingers were touching began to fog up.

Most of the military carriage had simple canvas covers as glass was a luxury item. The carriage which Regis and Clarisse were on had a total of six glass panel.

The glass panel was fixed to a wooden frame, which could be closed during battle as to prevent damage. At the same time, it could be opened as to relay orders, making it quite convenient.

The driver seat was outside.

Normally, a border regiment's finance was not enough to purchase such a latest model of carriage. This carriage was given to Regis by the southern New Nobles, Eleanor, last week.

Eleanor Ailred Winn de Tiraso Laverde was the granddaughter of a duke. Despite her young age, she was head of her house. In the southern part of Belgaria, she owned large pieces of real estate and farmland. In short, she was a real estate tycoon.

The reason behind the gifts was most likely to repay Regis for helping her at the crucial moment during the founding anniversary.

The gratitude was not simply financial support to the border regiment, but also a gift of the expensive carriage.

She was that generous.

As Fort Volk gradually disappear in her eyes, Clarisse said' “It’s my first time riding alone with you in a carriage.”

“Yeah, before this, there were Altina and Eric who was her escort too.”

Clarisse’s face slowly blushed.

“It’s a little embarrassing to be alone with you.”

“I-is that so?”

After suppressing his slight excitement, Regis took a book out of his leather bag.

Clarisse was surprised by that.

“Even at this situation, you are going to read a book, Regis?”

“Well…… This book is about the west. This is the only time for such book.”

“That’s true. After all, the battle is going to start once we reach there. I suppose it is better to understand the situation over there right now.”

“Well, I’m not sure whether it will be helpful to the battle…… This is a fantasy book set in the west.”

“Is that so?”

“This is a story regarding a boy and a girl souls being swapped. Though, the reason behind it is unclear… Well, since there is a rare chance, might as well take a look. After all, the journey is still long.”

“Regis, did you have breakfast?”

“Eh? That…… Well, I did not get any sleep, let alone breakfast.”

“In that case, why don’t you take a nap instead of reading?”

“No, it’s fine. If I really feel like sleeping, the place doesn’t matter. There was once that I fell asleep while walking down the stairs. It was such a dangerous experience.”

“That isn’t fine at all. What will you do if you fall sick? You should at least eat a little since the food is already prepared.”

“Okay. Though, I will feel like sleeping after eating.”

“In that case, isn’t it better that you take a nap?”

“Since I have the time to read books, it is a waste to sleep.”

“……”

Clarisse just smiled without saying anything.

Although Clarisse was smiling, the smile sent a chill down Regis' spine.

Clarisse took the basket near her feet and put it on her knee. After which, she proceed to open it.

Inside the basket were bread, dried meat and wrinkly vegetables.

Even though she handed the basket over, she did not say anything and kept smiling.

Ignoring her and continue reading the book -- Was not something that Regis dared to do.

"I-I guess … I should eat a little."

"Ara, you don't have to force yourself if you don't feel like it."

"… I want to eat."

"Fufufu, is that so?"

Regis took a piece of bread from the basket.

While other countries' bread were soft, the outer layer of Belgaria's bread was harder. Biting the bread would produce a crunchy sound.

Most likely, the difference was due to a different variation and production of wheat.

"That reminds me, the west procures wheat that produce soft bread."

"The people in the palace love it too."

"That's because many of the old nobles are from the west. Even the commoners too, given a choice, they would rather have soft bread."

"It's a little interesting."

"Well, we should be thankful that we still have bread to eat."

"I purchased some wheat as it were cheap due to a bountiful harvest. It will be nice if this is the case for this year too. "

"Ah, Professor Boutter once wrote a book called 'Southern Reform'. According to him, a thirty percent reduction in crop production will result in a hundred thousand of Empire's citizens dying of hunger. Although it seems a little exaggerated, one would realise this is not a bluff if they consider about the deterioration of law and order coupled with it."

"I'm not too knowledgeable about politics."

"I feel that Clarisse will be able to understand that."

To instantly realise that Regis was talking about politics, they need to have some understanding of politics itself.

After he finished eating the bread, Regis took a piece of meat.

Although it was a little salty, the meat was still delicious.

“Now that you mention, Clarisse, have you been working as a maid in the palace all the while?”

“That’s right. Both my mother and grandmother are palace maids too.”

“What about your father?”

In an instant, the carriage fell into silent.

Clarisse’s face became red.

“Ara ara, do you wish to meet my father? After all, we will pass by the capital. Though are you able to squeeze out some time? How sudden, Regis, I didn’t bring any nice clothes along~”

“… That… I’m sorry to say, but we are not going to stop at the capital.”

“Fufu, how regrettable. My father is a commoner, and also a soldier. He met my mother in the palace as he was a palace guard during one of his assignments.”

“A court romance… “

“It seems that my mother saw my father snitching food at party and threatens him to marry her. If not, she would summon the other guards…”

“I’m sorry, but that’s a story I never read before.”

“Fufu, it’s just a joke.”

“Since when?”

“When I tell you that it’s a little embarrassing to be with you.”

“Isn’t that almost the entire thing!”

Clarisse’s smile seems to be happier today.

“It’s such a joy to hear Regis retorting along with my words.”

“It’s different with others?”

“I suppose so…… Some get angry, while some get shocked.”

“I guess that there are many people out there not understanding that this is a joke. Well, I guess this was partly due to you frequently pranking others.”

“True, though you are the only one that I can prank on.”

“Haha…… What about Altina?”

“To prank Her Highness? I won’t ever dare doing that.”

“Eh?”

*Though towards the person you feared, you still hugged her like a cat and gently stroked her.*

*I guess that’s fine too.*

Regis stretched his body.

Eating while having an enjoyable conversation, it felt like the sheeps of slumber were jumping over the fence.

Clarisse started gently singing.

“Fais dodo~ Fais dodo~”

It was a lullaby.

Moreover, it felt like a sister cooing her brother to sleep.

When he realized it, it was just like what he told Clarisse. After eating, he felt like sleeping. Things were going according to what Clarisse planned.

*Still, this is fine.*

Regis leaned his head against the chair in the shaking carriage.

When he woke up, the convoy had already stopped for the third break

* * *

15th May

It started to drizzle

The Beilschmidt Border Regiment that was under Altina’s command had marched past the capital.

The reason they marched without stopping was because the Second Prince, Latreille, and the First Imperial Army was not in the capital.

They had already head towards the west.

It was rare to see the Emperor giving the orders personally. The citizens could feel that the battle against High Britannia was not a small skirmish.

During this period of unrest, Altina wanted to prevent the impression that they were marching into the capital while the First Imperial Army was away. Sometimes, impression was more important than facts.

The Border Regiment did not stop at the capital but continued west.

However, they still needed rest and resupply.

Hence, the regiment resupplied at Rouen which was near the capital.

They set up their camp outside the southern area of the city.

The time was around five o'clock in the evening.

Dinner preparations were going on all over the camp.

They set up a large tent and used it as the headquarter.

The entrance of the tent was guarded by heavy infantry. Regis was not yet used to their crisp and respectful salutes to him.

The Inside of the tent was warmer than outside when it was not raining.

Altina removed her drenched robe and stretched like a cat.

“Ha~ How tiring!”

“It’s been tough on you, Your Highness.”

Clarisse served tea, along with some biscuit.

“Thanks! Why don’t you try some, Regis?”

“It looks delicious, I will help myself then.”

“Like I thought, marching for two weeks straight is tiring. What’s more, I’m riding a horse… The infantry must be feeling even worse.”

“Yeah…… The soldiers had spent most of their strength to march such a long distance. It’s important that we grasped the correct timing to enter the war.”

Regis sat on a chair inside the tent and opened a map, putting it on the table.

The tables and chairs were foldable and were transported together with the tent via carriage.

Altina removed her shoulder guard and breastplate while Clarisse helped her out on the belt.

Currently, there were only three people in the tent.

“That reminds me, where is Sir Jerome?”

“He said that the march will dull his body, so he will be practicing his spear skill until dinner.”

“And you’re fine with it?”

“Isn’t my sword broken……”

Shifting his gaze to the middle on the tent.

Altina’s sword was lying inside a coffin-like casing.

Regis could only nod his head without saying anything.

While fighting off the Varden’s army, they encountered Franziska of the Penard Pendu. The result was that the Grand Tonnerre Quatre broke.

Although they brought along as it was the symbol of the regiment, the sword could not be used.

Altina used a normal longsword as a substitute. However, she could not show her full power even while practicing in the rain.

Altina had been in low spirits.

Regis opened the letter which was beside the map.

Altina then turned her head over to him.

“What is it?”

“This was Latreille’s order that I received earlier. It say stop at Rouen and meet up with the Seventh Imperial Army on the 16th.”

“Ara, the Seventh Imperial Army is coming?”

“Looks like that’s the case.”

The Seventh Imperial Army was heavily involved in the eastern battleline. As the type of battle at the eastern area was usually forest battle, the unit has little cavalry, but high in infantry. Though it should not exceed more than twenty thousand.

“Will we be joining up with them?”

“Yes…… I’m saying this as a strategist, the Seventh Imperial Army is not used to a plains battle and their General, Barguesonne, is already old.”

“Barguesonne… I can’t seem to remember anything about him.”

“Is that so?”

“I only met him once during a banquet in the palace.”

Altina lightly sighed.

Looks like it was due to her gender or bloodline…… In any case, he should be someone that has some prejudice. This kind of people was not rare among the Belgaria’s nobles.

“There are still a few days of travel before reaching the battlefield. Since we have a common enemy, I think it is still possible that we work together.”

“It will be best if that’s the case.”

Be it history or literature, it was not rare for a battle to end in defeat due to internal conflicts. To avoid becoming one of those, Regis deemed that communication and mediate between them was essential.

At this moment, it was noisy outside the tent.

The guards outside shouted, “Pardon me for the disturbance.”

“There’s a citizen seeking an audience.”

“Eh? Who is it? If it’s the mayor, I have already met him…”

Before setting up the camp, they already visited the mayor. Moreover, people from the Merchant Association and the Mercenary Association were there.

The mayor came together with the lord and visited them. After all, this city was under the emperor’s direct jurisdiction.

While Regis was thinking who was it, the guard outside report hesitantly.

“T-that… It’s your guest, Sir Regis.”

“Me? Is the person outside a merchant peddling his wares? But we have already resupplied… Since it’s already late, ask him to leave his name and come back tomorrow…”

As he gave the command, a female’s voice could be heard outside.

“Is Regis-chan in there?”

“Eh?!”

“Come out here, Regis-chan! Could it that you don’t recognise me?! If you dare say that, I’ll Ex-tin-guish the light!”

It was a familiar voice and that was not any normal threatening.

“C-could it be……”

“If you don’t come out quickly, I will spill all of your embarrassing moments out! Right, the spring when Regis the kid was twelve, it was an incident when he was going to enroll in the Military Academy in summer!”

“Wa?! I-isn’t it sister!”

Regis rushed out of the tent.

Altina and Clarisse looked at each other.

“Sister…? Regis’…?”

“He mentioned before that his sister married a blacksmith in Rouen…”

Outside the tent, a woman was surrounded by four heavy infantry.

However, the woman was not afraid at all.

She wore a headband on top of her black hair and wore beautiful hand-sewn clothes. If there anything similar to Regis, it would be her hair colour and the ears. Among the neighbours, they were said to be ‘siblings that looked as different as a tigress and a turtle’.

The ex-tigress was now the wife of a blacksmith and was full of smile while waving her hands.

“Well, Regis-chan! You really are here, that surprised me!”

Facing this smile, it felt like the fatigue from the journey of fifteen days suddenly crushed down on his shoulders.

“Ha…. That, If that wasn’t the case, would it be bad, sister?”

“Ahahaha, I definitely will not mistake your voice as someone else! It’s your fault for being so slow!”

That…… because this is an army headquarter with four thousand soldiers protecting it? After all, the important people of the regiment are here, so I didn’t think that anyone could come here easily.”

“If that’s the case, you should have come and find me! When I heard that the Marie Quatre Army was coming, I thought Regis-chan would be tagging along too. I was wondering when you will come and visit me, whether you are on the way here. If I keep waiting and you don’t come, then in the end I will still need to come and find you personally. How are you going to compensate me for that!"

“It’s my fault?!”

“That’s obvious, isn’t it?”

“Ha… I suppose so… It’s my fault… Ah, Your Highness?!”

Hearing how noisy it was outside, Altina also came out of the tent.

As she had removed her armour, she was currently in casual clothes.

“What is it, Regis?”

“M-my apologies! I will be back immediately!”

“Fool, since it’s the family member of the strategist, then she is considered an important guest to us.”

“If you put it that way… Ah?!”

Stuffing a hand into Regis mouth in order to silence him, his sister leaned closer to Altina.

“Ah?! Her Highness Marie Quatre?! It’s really is Her Highness Marie Quatre?! Looks like Regis-chan have been under your care!”

*What are the guards doing?!* Regis screamed in his heart. Apparently, the guards were also taken aback by her ‘mother from the countryside’ kind of atmosphere’.

Seeing how Altina had welcomed her, the guards did not dare to restrain Regis’ sister.

With the good atmosphere, Altina ushered Regis’ sister into the tent.

“Please enter, sister, and have a pleasant conversation.”

“Ara, really, I will make myself at home then.”

“Tell me more about Regis’ past.”

“Leave it to me, I will tell you about it till dawn!”

“Nooo!!!!”

Regis’ appeal was rejected.

Regis wanted to escape but had no choice but to join them despite having a dreadful feeling.

* * *

In the tent, Clarisse silently placed the cups that corresponded to the number of people on the table.

She was generally quiet when there were unfamiliar faces. Like a robot, she silently stood in a corner after finishing her job.

The other three were sitting around the table.

Regis' sister lowered her head.

"Nice to meet you, Your Highness Marie Quatre! I am Regis Auric's sister, Vanessa Smith. My brother has been under your care."

"Mn, nice to meet you. I am under his care instead, Regis had helped me countless time."

Vanessa waved her hand.

"How can that be! For him to help you!"

"It's real though?"

"I'm grateful enough that Regis-chan not getting executed by the military that I prayed to the goddess every day."

"I could not believe it either. When I was in the academy, I never thought that there would be a day I could be getting a salary from the military."

The two siblings were reminiscing about the past.

Altina shrugged her shoulders.

"That's true, after all, he isn't proficient in neither the sword nor horse riding. But that isn't all there is to be a soldier. Please believe me who believe in Regis."

"I understand, I promised you."

Seeing Altina and Regis smiling at each other, Vanessa looked like she was a fish that was out of the water.

"For that Regis-chan…… to be believed by someone…"

"Sister? Even I won't be a child forever."

"Impossible! Even though he is just a child that almost starved himself to death by reading books for three days straight!"

"Hahaha…… That hasn't changed at all……"

"Even though he would hide the pages of the books that have nudity and read it by closing one of his eyes while being embarrassed!"

"I-I didn't?!!"

"After that, he said that thing of his--"

“Ahhhhhh, that reminds me, sister, you said you wanted to meet me?! Is it to see whether I’m healthy?! If that’s the case, I was full of spirit?!”

He used past tense. Right now, he was mentally exhausted.

“Eh?” Vanessa tilted her head and began thinking.

Pa, her two hands clapped together.

“Right, visiting Regis-chan is just part of the reason.”

“There’s another reason?”

Vanessa surveyed the tent

“That is?”

“What?”

Vanessa made a gesture of some shape.

“Sword! Your Highness Marie Quatre’s sword! I heard that it was broken?”

“Eh?”

The one groaning was Altina.

Placing her hand on her petite chest, she lowered her head.

Vanessa saw that action.

“Arara, Your Highness Marie Quatre, the sword really broke?”

“……Erm… yes…”

“In a very bad state?”

“N-not to that degree! It’s just… the hilt…… “

Altina tried replying with hand gestures, but she was not that proficient in it. Even so, Vanessa replied kindly.

“The hilt was bent, is it? In that case…”

Unlike before, her expression changed as she entered into deep thoughts. She was no longer having the atmosphere of a sister that was teasing her brother, but of a merchant.

In Belgaria, where it was a patriarchal society, the wife would usually not interfere with their spouse’s work. That was even more so regarding crafting works.

Though that only applied to most the normal females.

This bold sister was brimming with vigour that could not be framed using common sense.

Regis then asked her.

“Where did you got this information regarding Her Highness’ sword?”

“That’s a secret.”

“Is that so…? Right, while this might not be related… But the one who manage the finance of this regiment is me. Any business deals have to go through me.”

Vanessa’s eyes widened.

She retreated unsteadily.

“I actually raised a brother that would intimidate his sister?!”

“Please do not change back to a sister under such atmosphere. Regarding Grand Tonnerre Quatre, I promise that I will leave it to you. Before that, tell me where did you get that information.”

“Well…… Since it’s Regis and not anyone else, it’s fine. It’s not something that is that surprising though? This news seems to have circulated among the mercenary groups. It even spreaded to normal citizens.”

“I see, so it’s the Renard Pendu that spread the news?”

“I think so.”

Altina had an expression of deep regret.

“B-but… I didn’t say anything!”

“It can’t be help, for mercenary groups to obtain better contracts, they have to raise their reputation.”

“If that’s the case, why not we hire them?”

“That’s not workable. Leaving aside that Renard Pendu lean towards Germania Federation and Franziska’s grudge. Our budget is not enough to hire the whole of Renard Pendu. In addition, the Mercenary King, Gilbert, has the highest cost on the continent.”

“Eh~”

Vanessa stood up from her seat and moved towards the centre of the tent where the coffin-like case was. Her intuition was quite accurate.

“Eh, is this it, Regis-chan?”

“…Your Highness, can you allow us to have a look?”

“Though I have no idea how it could help, but feel free to do so. It’s not like I will lose anything from it.”

“My gratitude, Your Highness Marie Quatre!”

After clasping her hand in gratitude, Vanessa opened the lid. As the lid was rather heavy, there were thoughts of helping, but it looked like help was not required.

Compared to three years ago before she was married, Vanessa looked more capable.

“Ara, the hilt is really bent.”

“Erm, the rumour is true… Are you satisfied now?”

As Altina sighed while talking, Vanessa shook her head in denial.

“What I’m going to say is actually the beginning, Your Highness Marie Quatre. This city housed the number one blacksmith in Belgar- No, in the continent! Will you please entrust your sword to me?”

“Eh? Blacksmith?”

“Yes! My husband, Enzo Bardot Smith, runs a large blacksmith shop here!”

“Ahhh, you did mention before.”

Altina looked at the sword in confused.

Regis was not surprised as he thought of it before. As he was not the owner, Regis was waiting for Altina to reply.

Altina asked seriously.

“That… you want to fix it?”

“Of course!”

Vanessa nodded her head.

Hearing the reason, Altina seemed to be unable to decide.

“Regis, what do you think?”

“I guess so… Originally, if it’s something like the Empire’s treasure sword, we should have the sword repaired by someone with adequate track record. However, these people are usually hired by the nobles.”

As the nobles supporting Altina had increased, they might receive some introduction of such skilled blacksmiths.

However, those blacksmiths did not have any workshop near Fort Volk which was at the border.

If they wrote letters to these blacksmiths, the best reply they would receive was to send the sword over for reparation……

This could take up to a few months.

Even so, the sword was from the founding emperor era, hence having historical worth. They could not be careless with the repairs.

After all, the important thing was that Altina’s life was attached to the sword. Regis was well aware that it was not right to keep suggesting things to Altina.

However, since this was the first time Altina herself actively request to discuss the options, Regis could only speak of those he thought beforehand.

“I believe that the faster the sword get repaired, the better. However, the one doing so must be selected by you, Your Highness. If the sword was not properly repaired, you will not just risk losing your life, but also public criticism.”

“In short, the problem is whether I believe the blacksmith… After all, this is something that could determine my fate.”

“Yes. As for the blacksmith being my brother-in-law, please remove that thought while considering.”

“Even if you say that, I won’t be able to decide without meeting the blacksmith! If I’m not wrong, we will be staying here until tomorrow?”

“If things go according to plan.”

Regis seemed confident that they would link up with the Seventh Imperial Army the next day.

The problem now was how the enemy would move.

Regis sent out many scouts as to obtain information regarding the enemy. It was necessary to prepare according to the enemy’s speed. Even so, Regis believed that the enemy’s speed would not be out of his expectation as High Brittania needed to bring their cannons with them.

Altina stood up from her seat.

“Then, tonight will be a good time! Let’s go now!”

“Ehh?!”

The one who let out that surprised sound was only Vanessa --Regis simply sighed.

Knowing her, Regis thought Altina would definitely do that.

“Your Highness…… Normally, one would call the blacksmith here…”

“Isn’t that a waste of time? If I decided to trust him, he still needs to bring the sword back.”

“At least let the soldiers send the sword…”

“It’s better to do it myself since it’s my own sword. I should be ashamed of myself if I let my subordinates do it instead.”

“Erm…”

If guards were sent to protect those transporters, it would be a relatively large group. This would cause a commotion and draw unwanted attention.

Previously when entering the capital, the Fourth princess earned the reputation of being thrifty as she used the relay stations.

Hence, there was a need to prevent mobilizing such a large group.

“Understood, but at least bring some guards……”

“Yes!”

“I wished Eric was here in such situation…. … Even though he is an ideal guard as he does not look intimidating……”

“You’re right.”

“It can’t be help…… Although it might be rude saying it this way, but let’s leave it to Sir Abidal Evra.”

“I will leave the arrangement to you. It’s too troublesome to carry the box along, so I will go get a cloth to cover the sword up.”

Clarisse who was standing at one corner asked softly.

“Your Highness, do you want to prepare your clothes?”

“Eh? Aah, right. I can’t go there looking like this. Although we just removed my armour, but please help me put them on again.”

“Understood.”

Vanessa was petrified.

“……?!”

“What is it, sister? Why are you in a daze, that’s a rare sight.”

“Her Highness Marie Quatre is coming to our house?”

“Isn’t that why you are here?”

“But, usually the blacksmith get called over?! Even for nobles who want to repair a pair of scissors, they would call us over?!”

“Well …… I suppose so. But Her Highness is a weird person.”

“That’s why I said that Regis-chan’ head will roll!”

“Ahhh, that’s a possibility.”

Be it his role as a strategist or as the sole admin officer. Instead of these reasons, it was easier to explain that the commander was a weird person. Regis always lack self-confidence..

After some time, Regis left the tent.

He gathered four heavy infantry guards who saluted him.

At that moment, it began to rain.

Rouen which was at the west of the capital Versailles required about half a day of travel.

As the journey could be completed on the same day by using carriage, part of the Empire had the atmosphere of a commercial district.

In the capital, it was filled with expensive houses and stores that represent the Empire. In contrast, this city was filled with commoners, hence explaining the numerous stalls and houses.

As it was dusk and coupled with the rain, most of the stalls which were along the main road had already closed for the day.

Altina who was armoured to the minimum did not mind the rain while the sword was hanging from her shoulders. As the sword was larger than her height, she could not wear any rain poncho.

“Even the princess is drenched, so we cannot avoid the rain either!” Hence Abidal Evra and his ten subordinates only wore their light armour.

On the other hand, Regis and Vanessa wore rain ponchos.

While Clarisse stayed behind.

As this was their smallest team they could form, they could avoid attracting any attention while advancing through Rouen's main street.

Altina was puzzled as she surveyed the surrounding.

"Although there are shops which are still open.. … It seems like there isn't much customers."

"Yes. Though the city is livelier around this timing… it's because everyone is afraid. After all, the enemy have invaded deep into our territory. This is the first time in the past ten years."

Vanessa who was leading them to the workshop replied to Altina. Even though Belgaria was strong, other than war, Belgaria also focused on negotiation. Which was why they could one-sidedly invade others with overwhelming force.

Although territories might be snatched back by the enemy occasionally, it was rare for the enemy to invade that deeply.

It had been a long time since cities so near to the capital were aware of enemy forces.

Regis shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, even though we are invaded, the distance between here and there is about 50Li (222km). Even with a carriage, it would take three days of travel. To counterattack, we mobilized a force about a hundred thousand…… I believe it's unlikely that the enemy would come here."

"It would be a pain if they came."

Vanessa shrugged her shoulders too.

As the two made the same action, Altina chuckled as she finds it interesting.

Soon, they reached a large workshop.

"Impressive!"

The appearance of this workshop suited Altina's preference.

It was rare for workshops to use iron door. Black smokes were coming out of the large chimney which was behind the brick building with a triangle roof.

Unlike the usual small chimney used to keep warmth, this chimney was used by workshops to disperse the black smoke.

Sound of metal being struck was coming from the inside.

There were a few words made in metal hanging above the unusual door.

It says 'Le forgeron D'enzo Bardot Smith' (Enzo Bardot Smith's Workshop).

Vanessa opened the side-door instead of the main door.

"We are honored to have you here, Your Highness Marie Quatre. Although it's small, but please take a rest here."

“Ara, is this the place where you receive your guests?”

“No, here is my house. The workshop isn’t a place to welcome a royalty…”

“It’s not like I’m asking you to welcome me with leather couch and glass table. Or could it be that you do not want to show me the terrible state the workshop is in?”

“No, definitely not! However… There is still a need to tidy up a little if all of you are going in…”

“If it’s the guards, they can wait outside. Although they will have it tough in the rain, but my subordinates are not weak.”

As if to back Altina’s words, Abidal Evra and the rest who were behind her saluted.

Some curious children stuck their heads out of the windows while their mothers tried to pull them back into the houses.

*It’s better not to attract attention though* — Regis sighed once again at that thought.

Altina shifted her gaze to the workshop.

“I want the sword repaired. Since there is someone who might be capable of doing it, I shall wait for him to welcome me. After all, if I don’t meet him personally, I will not know about him.”

“W-what?! To let Your Highness wait in the rain?!”

“Since I’m the one having my sword repaired while the blacksmith is here. In this case, isn’t it basic courtesy?”

As blacksmith required a lot of labour, it was a commoner’s job.

However, blacksmiths relying on their arm power have a rather high social standing in Belgaria where wars were frequently waged.

At the very least, a famous blacksmith would be invited by nobles to their territory. They would receive various benefits like tax exemption or given a workshop. Excellent weapons would be viewed as an art piece and could be sold at a high price.

Even so, Enzo was not evaluated highly as he lacked great track records.

Vanessa’s confusion was understandable.

Altina continued to stand firmly under the rain.

“I know that I can’t change anything alone. If I deem him necessary, I am willing to do anything that I am able to. If I simply sit and wait without doing anything because I am afraid of disappointment, it's the same as getting imprisoned”

Regis removed his rain poncho on his head, causing the water to drip down.

“Sister… In any case, can you pass the message to brother-in-law first? Since things have already become like this, even a horse would not be able to pull Her Highness away.”

“Wait a moment, Regis? Do not compare her to a bull used in farming!”

“If it’s a bull, at least we can make use of bait and other methods.”

Vanessa only said “immediately” and ran into the room.

According to her plans, letting her brother who was the strategist recommend them would at least create a business opportunity for them.

However, she never thought that they would conduct a business with the princess directly. Furthermore, she never would had dreamt that the princess would come visiting the workshop despite the rain.

*I really keep getting surprised by Altina’s actions*—— Regis sighed in his heart.

The hammering sound stopped and was replaced by some commotion inside the workshop.

Not long after that, the metal door was opened.

A man who was topless with a piece of cloth hanging on his waist was kneeling with one knee with his head lowered.

There were flabs on his muscular body, but his built was considered heavyweight. He had short hair and was beardless.

Vanessa was waiting behind him standing.

“Wel-welcome! Please come inside!”

“Pardon my intrusion!”

Altina stepped into the workshop gracefully despite this being her first time entering it. As expected of a royalty, to be able to stay calm in such situation.

The workshop was large.

It was a large as Fort Volk’s officer’s dining hall which could host forty people.

However, the various equipments and tools, as well as the furnace made the room looked small.

Although it was May, the temperature here was high enough to make people sweat buckets.

There were six young men inside the workshop. There wore thick aprons hanging on top of their shirts, their hands holding hammers and tongs as they looked towards Altina and company nervously.

Regis who was standing beside Altina broke into a gentle smile.

“It’s been awhile, brother-in-law—— Your Highness, this person here is the blacksmith, Enzo Bardot Smith.”

As he was introduced, Enzo’s mouth became slanted. Perhaps he was trying to smile.

To ease the atmosphere, Regis used an intimate way of addressing him…… He wondered whether Altina was angry since she was making such a serious face.

On the other hand, Enzo was standing still and having a nervous expression, as if he was sick.

“I-I am honoured to have you here!”

“I heard that you can repair my sword?”

“Can I take a look first?”

“Sure.”

One working bench was not enough to put the sword.

After Enzo instructed his disciples, they began to move another bench and combined the two benches into one.

Altina put her Grand Tonnerre Quatre onto the bench.

As it was raining, coupled with the fact that the hilt was bent, the sword was covered with a cloth. Now, the cloth was removed.

Enzo and his disciples gulped as they watched.

Altina used her hand to remove the cloth, causing them to widen their eyes and sighing.

“How is it?”

“Can I touch it?”

As the sword was revealed, Enzo who looked as he was sick before have a professional look now.

In response to his question, Altina nodded as a reply.

Enzo carefully lift up the scabbard.

This time, it was Altina whose eyes widen.

He actually was able to lift the sword up and held it with one hand as if it was a normal longsword while his other hand slowly drew the sword out.

Even in Beilschmidt Border Regiment, there was no one with such arm strength. He was not overexerting himself but was true to his bear-like physique.

As the sword was longer than normal, it probably required some effort. However, Enzo did not require any help while he drew the sword out from its scabbard and placed it on the bench.

“It’s quite heavy…”

“That’s right.”

“Also, the balance isn’t good…”

Zawa— Such a sound could be heard as the disciples’ faces paled.

Criticising a national sword in front of a royalty was the same as criticising the empire. Depending on how the conversation goes, it would not be a surprised if he was charged of Lese Majeste.

Even Abidal Evra and the guards who were guarding outside could hear it as he stared that way.

Vanessa interjected the conversation in a panic.

“M-my apologies! My husband isn’t that good with words!”

Altina raised one of her hand and stopped Vanessa.

“I’m talking with the blacksmith.”

“… Yes…”

The people around the area thought that the princess was angry.

Altina leaned closer to Enzo.

“What do you mean, tell me in full details.”

“This hilt is too short for the blade. The material for the hilt used is a fragile material that prioritized lessening the weight. For this to be a treasure sword, what a joke.”

He readily said so.

The disciples let loose silent cries of sorrow while Abidal Evra’s face reddened and was about to pull his sword out.

Vanessa’s face was pale to the point she was about to faint. However, Regis used his shoulder to support her and whispered to her.

“It’s fine, sister.”

“Ha, eh?”

Altina slammed her hand onto the bench. A loud sound was produced.

The surrounding fell into silence.

Everyone was watching her.

The disciples were prepared for her to sentence them, the soldiers were waiting for the order to pull their sword out while Vanessa was praying to the gods.

Only Regis was calm.

Altina said loudly.

“Is it as I thought?! This sword is weird, right?!”

The only one who could understand her words was Regis while Enzo nodded his head after awhile.

“Although this is my first time seeing this sword, I have seen many swords from the Founding Emperor’s era. Every one of them who survived the era are all practical swords. I can understand that the sword is well-decorated since it’s the Founding Emperor’s sword. Even so, it is strange. Didn’t L’Empereur Flamme usually take the lead in the battlefield? For a hero like him, it’s impossible for him to use a useless sword like this!”

“Just like you said! Indeed, the sword is hard to use, right?”

“To think you actually can use this sword!”

“It can’t be help, since this is something bestowed by the emperor. If I say something like that, people would think that I can’t hold the sword and was sorry about taking it. Isn’t that frustrating!”

“Hahaha! That’s right!”

“Then, can it be repaired?”

“Do you want it repaired as a decoration? Or as a weapon?”

“As a weapon of course!”

Although she was the fourth Princess and a Major General in the Empire, the commoner blacksmith did not use honorifics and laughed loudly while saying “Oh, you”.

The disciples’ faces were as white as a new shirt.

Vanessa seemed to have given up hope. Or rather, her calm face was like a widow standing in front of his spouse’s grave.

Abidal Evra and his subordinates were holding their heads. As they had traveled to the capital together, they knew about the princess’ personality like how she interacted with the commoners without any distinctions.

Regis sighed again. The conversation seemed to have ended.

However, it was a little too much to let his sister and Enzo’s disciples to continue worrying. That goes the same for Abidal Evra and the rest who were still standing in the rain.

As such, Regis interjected Altina who was excited about the sword.

“Your Highness… Everyone else is still in shock. Also, I have information about the sword which might be useful. Can we move to somewhere quieter and continue the conversation there?”

“Regis, what do you know?”

“That is something for later… “

“Ah, that’s right. It isn’t too good to keep standing in the rain and it seems like we have interrupted the workshop’s operation. Regis’ sister, can we borrow a place to speak?”

“Eh?! Ah, of course!”

Enzo seemed to realise something suddenly and had a terrible expression.

“Ah… Pardon me for my impoliteness! I… Ah, no, once I start talking about weapons, I become absorbed in it…… To speak so brashly towards a royalty……”[1]

It was a little late to realise that.

However, Altina happily said, “Ahaha, don’t worry about it. Etiquette is too troublesome and it’s enough with just the Ceremony Department using it. It’s the blacksmith’s skill that we are looking for here!”

Though Enzo was completely curling up in fear.

* * *

The house beside the workshop was large enough to let the whole group enter.

[1] The first ‘I’ used is more informal compared to the latter ones.

However, only three guards were inside the room while the rest were outside guarding as Abidal Evra ordered. Though the 'outside' was them standing under the roof.

What was admirable was that the team captain, Abidal Evra, decided to go outside.

The fatigue of marching for days coupled with the rain during May's nights, one would rather stay warm inside a house. As such, he decided to let his subordinates guard the house.

Another reason for it could be him following Altina's words like 'no one would want to follow you if you do not take the lead for the troublesome task.'

It would be great if there were more officers like him.

Inside the house built by bricks, Regis and the rest relaxed themselves.

The big table was enough for ten people. Most likely, they had their dinner together with the disciples.

On the shelves were actually iron-made toys for children.

*That reminds me, I haven't seen my nephews yet.* Regis remembered.

Regis' sister, Vanessa, had two children.

*I hope they are healthy……*

As his brother-in-law's workshop seemed to be thriving, they had hired three maids and had a luxurious meal.

Steamed potatoes, grilled pork sausages, salty soup and diced vegetables.

Vanessa who was uneasy said, "We didn't really specially prepare anything."

However, Altina was rather happy as this was her first time eating at a table of commoners.

"I'm grateful that you even prepared my share despite my sudden intrusion."

"No, not at all! Having a meal with Your Highness Marie Quatre is the greatest moment of my life!"

"That's exaggerating too much."

*If Altina's smile right now was written on her biography, it would definitely be an insight on her personality. Would it be recorded as her belittling the Royal authority, or mingling with the commoners without any social barriers? This would be dependent on the author…"* Regis thought.

Vanessa returned to the kitchen to serve more dishes. She was probably preparing the shares for the disciples.

Only Altina, Regis and Enzo were left at the table while the guards were at the room next door.

They began their meal after saying grace.

Altina drank some soup and said, "I hope that Mr Smith can speak to us in a relax manner. There's no need for formal speech. That's was why I sent the guards to the other room."

Enzo still had a perplexed look…… Perhaps he was too engrossed when he spoke bluntly earlier. It would be better to forgive him first.

Even Regis had relaxed himself to ease the mood.

“Then, returning to the topic earlier…”

Once Regis spoke of it, Altina immediately swallowed the potato in her mouth and said.

“What do you know about the sword?”

“It’s nothing big though? Approximately three hundred years ago, it was a period where our relations with our neighbours were relatively good. We only had some conflict at the northern area who was not yet the Germania Federation. Most likely, it was unrealistic to wage war and conduct negotiation across the eastern and southern mountains.”

“Unrealistic?”

“That’s because they could only produce low quality carriage at that time. Even the horses were small and weak. In fact, it was rare for people to use large horses back then.”

“I see, so what about it?”

“As there weren’t much war, it was a period where arts were valued as Belgaria focused on culture and etiquette. Paintings, sculpture, plays, dances… it was a period when these were at its peaked. Even knights were more concerned about arts than martial arts. Even for weapons, the priority of appearance outweighs that of the usage.”

“But a weapon is a weapon?”

Acknowledging Altina’s words, Enzo nodded in agreement.

On the other hand, Regis shook his head.

“A weapon is a tool in order to obtain victory in war and war happens because we want to protect our home. If one exists in an era where art is appreciated, helpful in promoting one’s status, they will have the notion that a beautiful weapon is the best.”

“Hmm… I kind of understand what you are saying…… Among the nobles, most of them are still using glittering golden sword that seems unusable.”

“Although we dislike those weapons that have low practicality since we are at war, it’s difference three hundred years ago when Grand Tonnerre Quatre was modified.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“There’s no problem with the blade as it was made in Tristei, however material used for the hilt was leather and wood. Rather than saying repair, it was totally changed. As to why it was changed according to the era taste… Well, it was said that the emperor of that era could not lift the sword up and felt that it’s better to make it lighter…:”

Altina showed an unhappy look upon hearing that.

“Go and train some more!”

“Tell that to the emperor three hundred years ago.”

“When I rise to the heaven, I will do so.”

Thinking of the scene of Altina who was in an era of war pestering the emperor of a peaceful era, Regis felt a little sympathetic towards the peaceful king.

“As books weren’t that common in that era, no detailed information was written down…… However, as painting was common, there should be a few pictures of Grand Tonnerre Quatre before the modification.”

Though it was likely the artist also added some of his ideas.

Arts from a peaceful era tend to exaggerate more. The so-called peace was just stagnation and uninteresting. In an era of war, practical thoughts were more important.

Which was why Regis liked things that were filled with dreams rather than practical thoughts. In short, he was chasing after the products of a peaceful era.

“Although I never see it before, but the painting should be in the Empire’s Arts Museum. You can use it as a reference.”

“Then let’s go immediately!”

Regis restrained Altina who stood up instantly.

“Calm down… You still have the role of commanding the Beilschmidt Border Regiment, isn’t it?”

“Ah… that’s right, what should I do?”

“Commoners are not allowed into the Arts Museum, so you can use your name to permit a commoner entering. The one who should be going is my brother-in-law… Well, that’s provided he accepted the job.”

Regis shifted his sight to Enzo.

He was paying attention to this interesting topic.

“To resurrect the sword that was made strange by the emperor three hundred years ago?! I am intrigued!”

“Are you willing to accept?”

“Of course!”

“You have my thanks! I will be counting on you then!”

Regis thought that the two get along quite well.

No matter what, it was a good thing that they could get along. Although it was a good thing, not everything was solved.

After the meal, Regis stood up from his seat.

“Brother-in-law, I have something to discuss with you, are you free?”

“Eh?”

“This way……”

Regis brought him to another room.

Enzo had a suspicious look.

“Hey, Regis-chan…… Up to just now, the kid who was still speaking to the princess so normally, can you not use formal speech with me, I would be troubled by that.”

“Well, there’s that……”

“I was surprised when I heard that you became the princess’ strategist. I originally thought that you were just lucky to be used by the princess among many others… But you look like you are friends with the princess, isn’t it?”

“That’s right. Though in a normal noble’s army, there’s a need to be aware of the hierarchy……”

No one would be able to imagine an army that was without discipline like this.

“She seems to like you huh?”

“How do I say it… More like, I’m not disliked by her…… It’s just because various things happened when I first met the princess.”

Regis talked about how Altina disguised herself as a carriage driver and Regis interact with her, thinking that she a junior.

Eventually, these habits became quite natural.

Probably Altina was also finding someone suitable to talk with her.

Regis believed that Altina felt that using formal speech would prevent one from looking clearly at others.

Being in the palace that was filled with enemies, it was rather pitiful.

*For a commoner to find the royalty pitiful is a joke……* Regis had a wry smile in his heart.

When there were only the two of them in the room, Regis started talking.

“The thing I want to discuss about is about the fee.”

“Really… It won’t be cheap to refurbish a sword of that caliber.”

“Brother-in-law…… While this workshop is reliable, isn’t it about time to get famous? Repairing a national sword is a big job though?”

“Even I know about that.”

“Think about the future, don’t you think it’s good to give some discount? It would raise your own value.”

“Ah, hmm…… My own value, is it? However, precious metals are required to decorate the sword…”

“If it’s necessary, we will prepare the deposits.”

“What, deposits?! Uh.. is that so……”

“The payment will be in cash.”

“It’s a great help if it’s not in credit!”

To professionals like them, payment using credit was normal.

They were not paid immediately once they accepted a job. Instead, they would only receive payment during the end of a month or year end.

One of the reasons was because that the nobles lived off the taxes. If taxes were not paid yet, they did not have much cash in hand. That goes the same for the professionals and servants under them.

They would still buy even if they had no cash, resulting in the actual payment being later. Such practices were common no matter in which era.

Even so, the professionals only looked at it as a debt without interests. As the commoners' standing was weak, there would be people who were troubled by this type of payment by nobles.

As expected, for Enzo who was not fluent with words, this was even a bigger problem to him.

"Brother-in-law, if there are any outstanding payments, we will be able to pay for those."

Enzo's face changed.

Most likely, a lot of debts had accumulated.

One could easily guess without asking. For a friendly personality like his, it was not suitable for business.

Enzo lowered his head and was troubled.

"Actually, I couldn't even get back a part of the debts by the nobles……"

"That sure is troubling. It's fine though, we will take it all up. Then, about the sword……"

"I understand. I need to go through it thoroughly before deciding, so please wait a moment. If possible, I will give you the cheaper price."

"Please hold back a little…"

Even so, the nobles who did not pay their debts would be surprised. After all, a royalty would urge them to pay their debts to a mere commoner blacksmith.

* * *

Altina was slowly eating the potato alone.

In fact, it had been a long time since Altina had to eat alone since Clarisse was not around.

Altina remembered the time when she was still in the palace.

Vanessa brought alcohol and cups over.

"Ara?"

"If you're finding Regis and Mr Smith, they are having a conversation in another room."

"Oh my, for them to leave Your Highness alone!"

"I'm fine with it if they could negotiate successfully. Compared to that, I want to ask you about something since it's a rare opportunity."

"It's my honour."

Although she was a commoner, the workshop was thriving which was why she could prepare wine glasses. Red liquor was slowly poured into it.

“It’s just something cheap……”

“Expensive stuff are not guaranteed to be good.”

As the palace was filled with hostility and malicious rumours, Altina was chased out. No matter how good the wine in the palace was, it tasted like mud to her. Having a conversation with someone without any malice like this was a refreshing experience to her.

“Do you want to hear about Regis-chan?”

“That’s right. He doesn’t really speak about his past, neither about his parents.

“Ah…… Our parents died due to a pandemic while Regis was eight.”

“Is that so…”

“Regis-chan had been a bibliophile since he was a kid, burying himself in father’s study room. As he doesn't really leave the house much, he had little friends…… That was troubling…”

“Fufu, even now, he’s the same.”

“Even someone like me who is older doesn’t understand those difficult books.”

“Did he enlist into the military because of the living expenses?”

“If it’s that, he could work as a servant like me. Though he would be busy with chores from dawn to dusk.”

“It’s really isn’t an easy job.”

“That’s right…… Let alone squeezing time to read, he couldn’t even have the money to buy books.”

“That reminds me, he said he wanted to be a librarian in the military library.”

“He really is a nerd.”

Vanessa sighed.

Though it was thanks to that Altina could recruit Regis as a strategist, which was not a bad thing.

“It seems like you spent much effort, sister.”

“Fufu…… that’s true…… I was really worried about Regis-chan. Even when he entered the military academy, he kept saying he won’t be able to last and would be expelled.”

Altina nodded.

Regis’ swordsmanship was even worse than a child, even his horse riding skill was hopeless. In fact, it was surprising that he could graduate from the strict Military Academy of Belgaria.

Most likely, there was an area which he excelled at.

“Is it because Regis had never lost in terms of strategies?”

“Hehe, only within the academy.”

“Within the academy?”

“There were mock battles with other schools. Although only one could be chosen from the many representatives…… He lost to the son of count Vicente”

“Oh, seems like he’s quite clever.”

“That’s not it. Even though he was also called a genius, but there’s a reason for that…… Ah, Your Highness Marie Quatre, do you know what exactly a mock battle of strategies is?”

“I’m not too sure of it, after all, I couldn’t attend military schools. Though I would definitely go if I was a boy.”

“Me too!”

The two of them nodded their head excitedly.

Vanessa continued her words.

“The mock battle is similar to moving pieces in chess. They would undergo a discussion and the referee would decide which one of them is the better one.”

“Ahh, that really sounds like debates?”

“That is so. At that time, a military man who came all the way from the eastern frontline was the referee…… If I remember correctly, the Vicente House Head at that time was in that man unit.”

Altina narrowed her brows..

“In other words, the referee was the candidate's father colleague?”

“It seemed that that man was his subordinates.”

“If that’s the case, it’s questionable about the judgement. Though I don’t know much pressure he had at that time……”

“It’s true! I even wanted to request for a rematch! While I felt disappointed hearing that, Regis at that time said, ‘I*t’s just a game, there’s no need to blow things up.*’!”

“Ahaha…… That’s really is like Regis.”

“It really is!”

“Then, at least he never lost before within the academy… How incredible. Isn’t it something he can take pride in? At least he could be more confident if he had something to be proud of.”

“Does Regis-chan really lack confidence?”

“Yup. He’s also dense.”

“Eh?”

“Ah, no… I… Standing in shoes, isn’t Regis someone who I can entrust with important roles? That’s why I even take note of his mental wellbeing.”

“To be able to receive Your Highness’ care…… Regis sure is lucky.”

“Ahaha……”

Altina gave a wry smile, thinking that the sister was a little too exaggerated.

As if she remembered something, Vanessa looked up.

“That’s right…… The reason why Regis-chan have no confidence…… might be related to me.”

“What happened?”

“When I was twelve, our parents passed away. Our situation was that we had to sell away items as to continue living.”

“That’s rather serious……”

“That’s right. But I was already an age old enough to be a maid. The noblewoman who knew my parents was kind enough to hire me, thus enabling us to overcome the ordeal…… As that was my first time doing some things, there were times I failed and times when I returned home feeling depressed…… Even at that time, Regis-chan was always in the study room.”

“I see, and then?”

“At that time, he knew a lot more than me. Most likely, he won’t even lose to a teacher.”

“So he’s that way since a child.”

“For example.. One day, an adult came to our house and said the roof was broken and needed repair to prevent rain from dripping in. He moved on saying about the pillar was rotting and in the end, requires us to rebuild our house.”

“Isn’t that bad?!”

“Regis-chan who was ten at that time replied him, saying ‘*Is that so, uncle? Even though the house was renovated last year, it would be bad if they were being skimpy. Could you follow me to the police and explain it to them?*’“

“That’s the young Regis?”

“Yup, even though I was panicking…… The man had an awkward face and said, ‘*Ah, it’s just repaired recently? Could I be wrong with my judgement? Hahaha… pardon me.*’ and quickly escaped.”

“Eh? What’s going on?!”

“After that man left, Regis-chan told me- ‘*That man just now, was trying to scam us. ’* ”

“Eh, scam?! Did you not report to the police?!”

“It was useless. Compared to those newly built houses, the roof of ours were inferior. If we didn’t repair it, water dripping in and causing the pillar to rot wasn’t false. However, letting you feel that those would happen very soon is the methods of those scammers.”

“Then, is it fine not to repair it?”

“It’s fine to repair the roof when it starts to leak. So I started to have that habit… This was something I learned from books.”

Altina was stupefied hearing those words.

Vanessa sighed once more.

“Of course, the thing about our roofs being fixed recently was a lie. That was to chase the scammer away.”

“To actually deceive the scammer?”

“That is so.”

“Isn’t that reliable?! Why did he have no confidence?”

“I had to work hard in order to raise Regis. That was how I lived my life. Although he is rich in experiences and good with words that could shame the adults, he did not show off nor get complacent. That was why I said those words…”

“Eh? What did you said?”

“The useless Regis who can’t even do anything without me! Something like that…”

“Eh…?”

Altina widen her eyes.

While Vanessa lowered her head.

“If I didn’t say that, I …… won’t be able to work hard. The twelve year old me would lost my motivation to work hard if Regis was that clever. I can’t have him becoming a reliable clever child…”

“Is that so……”

“I didn’t expect he would be affected as an adult.”

“That’s right.”

While her words were questionable, those were the words of a twelve-year-old who was in a tough situation. She could not be blamed for that.

That became a thorn in Regis heart, causing him to lose his confidence as he grew up. No one was at fault—

“Hm? But isn’t he himself the root cause for not training his body?”

“Ahh, that. You’re right! When I passed the wheat I bought from the market to that child, he was actually squashed by the wheat.”

“How weak……”

“That’s because he kept reading books.”

“He should at least train once in awhile!”

“That’s right! Because of that, I prefer man with muscles than brains, just like my husband. Ara, how embarrassing, to say that in front of Your Highness!”

“Ah, hm……”

She threw a flashbomb at the very end. Regis came back from the room next door.

“The main topic has been settled. Brother-in-law had went to take a look of the sword. After that, we would receive the price. Most likely, it would be within our budget.”

Altina thought for a second.

If Regis was not around, what would happen? At the very least, the reparation deal would not be concluded this fast.

Perhaps she could not even stop the Varden’s army at Fort Volk.

Going back further, she might not even able to conquer the fortress…… The more she remembers, the more she felt that she couldn’t do without his guidance.

Vanessa probably had the same idea as the two looked at Regis.

“……”

“……”

“W-what?”

Regis flinched a little.

Altina looked at him and muttered.

“Hehe, well, things like Regis being Regis.

“Ha…?”

Thinking that he was being laughed at, his face reddened.

Vanessa quickly stood up.

“Regis-chan? Go take a look at your nephews. You haven’t seen them yet, right?”

“Ah, yeah, that’s right.”

“Fufufu, though the youngest is still a baby.”

“T-that…… I want to have a look too!”

Altina stood up and leaned forward.

Vanessa was surprised at first, but showed a smile immediately.

Like the gentle sunlight, the expression she had was neither a passionate businessman nor the courageous sister, but of a mother.

“Hehe, go ahead, it’s our honour.”

# Chapter 3: The Seventh Imperial Army

The next day.

Shortly after noon, the Seventh Imperial Army arrived at Rouen city.

Although the unit was filled with infantry and little cavalry, they were veterans who served in the eastern frontlines which saw action as intense as the northern frontlines.

The Seventh Imperial Army's core was Duke Barguesonne's private army. Excluding the mercenaries, half of it were regulars while the others were light infantry, militias conscripted from their territories

Whatever the case was, all of them were veterans, hence explaining the General aura they were emitting.

Beilschmidt Border Regiment's camp was located the south of the city. The Seventh Imperial Army set their formation as if half surrounding them.

Seeing this situation, Altina frowned.

"What is that supposed to mean? Even though the north, east and west of the city are empty, they choose to come to the south?"

"Most likely, they want to intimidate us."

Regis could not think of any other reasons.

In such situation, they should not be foolish enough to fight amongst themselves. Even the General of the Seventh Imperial Army knew that.

It was likely that this provocation was meaningless… That or the Seventh Imperial Army had their own plans. Whatever it was, the most important thing for them now was not to care about this.

However, Altina was unable to calm down.

"Do you want to protest against this?"

"It's just a cheap provocation, there's no need to react to it… If we aren't careful, we might make a blunder and be labelled as overstepping our authority."

"Ahh, not bad. That's the way to go."

"While I don't know Lieutenant General Barguesonne, I got the feeling he is someone I do not wish to meet."

"Ara, how rare for Regis not to know something."

"About the nobles, while there are biographies about them, they cannot be used as a reference as they usually beautify the work."

"They are just filled with praises and compliments anyway."

"Well… According to all the legendary exploits of the nobles, we should have decimated the armies of the neighbouring countries three times over. But somehow, we are still at war with them.."

“What a stupid legend.”

While they were conversing, a horseman carrying the Seventh Imperial Army’s banner came over.

He was a messenger.

Soon, the heavy cavalryman reached the front of the Beilschmidt Border Regiment’s camp. From his impressive appearance, most likely he was not a normal messenger but an officer who was a noble.

Despite being an ally, soldiers from the regiment were filled with killing intent due to the pointless provocation by the Seventh Imperial Army.

The Seventh Imperial Army surrounded their unit as if they were the enemy.

As if not caring about this, the messenger dismounted and kneeled.

“Pardon me! A message from General Barguesonne!”

In terms of hierarchy, General Barguesonne had the right to issue orders due to his rank being higher than Altina. Even so, they should first link up as it was basic etiquette.

Altina had a terrifying look.

Even though Regis did not like to stand out, he walked forwards as it would be troublesome if a problem arise here.

“Pray convey the orders.”

“A war council will convene soon, please make haste to the Seventh Army’s headquarters.”

“As ordered, we will attend immediately.”

Regis didn't bother with the lack of preceeding etiquette.. If he wanted to pursue this, he should do so only in his heart.

Regis who lacked self-esteem did not feel angry about how arrogant the messenger was.
*Do they have to do this as to assert their position?* He harboured doubts.

Intimidating one’s ally was the same as fighting with a dog. No matter what, it was impossible for them to be enemies officially.

Regis took out a watch from his chest pocket and confirmed the time.

“Then… Please pass down the message that we will be attending at fourteen hundred hours.”

“Understood!”

The horseman stood up and looked at the regiment’s soldiers

And sneered.

“I heard that the Beilschmidt Border Regiment held the northern border and captured Fort Volks, but to think the regiment is just so normal.”

The surrounding was getting agitated to the point they would immediately jumped on him and cut him up.

Just before Altina who felt the strongest urge to do just that could react, Regis replied the messenger despite not being interested in it.

“Was it General Barguesonne’s order to disparage us?”

“No.”

“Then, please pass down the following message to the General. It’s better not to send a noisy messenger.”

“?!”

The messenger was embarrassed and angered by it.

The soldiers around them could not stop laughing.

If Regis did not say those words, then the army’s morale would be affected.

After being called annoying, saying anything more would be foolish. The messenger saluted and quickly mounted the horse.

Woohoo! The soldiers let out sounds as to ridicule the messenger.

Altina sighed in relief.

“Thanks, Regis.”

“To think that after two weeks of marching, we would need to engage in a war of words between allies, how appalling.”

“If not for you, I would have drawn my sword out.”

“As we had to meet the General after this, it would be troublesome if we do not control ourselves a little.”

“To think there is another strong enemy other than the High Britannia’s army.”

*She doesn't seem like shes joking. I'm going to have a headache.*

“Thanks for your hard work, come in.”

General Barguesonne was sitting on a chair larger than anyone else and said so without lowering his head.

From his unwelcoming attitude, one could understand his speech was for the sake of formality.

He was an old man with white hair and beard. Because of his wrinkles, his scary look was even more terrifying. His eyes was like lightning, and pierced through the Regis who did not train his back muscles.

Beside him was an aide armed with spear.

The Lieutenant General was someone who experienced many wars even before Regis was born.

Altina who was addressing him saluted by moving her right hand to her chest.

“General Barguesonne, I have a question to ask before coming under your command.”

Regis felt something heavy hitting him.

*What does she want to say?* Regis began to tremble as he could not determine what she mean to say.

Those who came to the Seventh Imperial Army's camp were only Altina, Regis and a few guards who were outside waiting.

Jerome said "I'll leave the troublesome things to you guys" and did not show himself up. Considering his reputation, he should be attending the meeting too.

The Seventh Imperial Army's headquarters tent was larger than that of Beilschmidt Border Regiment.

Rather than saying that it was a conference room, it felt closer to an audience room with the General sitting at the innermost. The senior officers stood at either sides as if they were opening a path in the middle.

There were about thirty people.

Even for a meeting between staff officers, it was a large number.

Altina was staring straight at the General.

The soldiers at the sides glared at them.

While Regis wanted to stop Altina from talking, he could not do something so improper.

Altina received their glares and said.

"General, I know that you do not acknowledge me, but that's fine since you support Latreille. However, if you view and purposely take action against the Beilschmidt Border Regiment as an enemy in this battle… Can I consider that as a rebellion against the Empire?"

This was spoken verbally anyway and would be off the records.

Like a bursting bubble, Regis almost fainted on the spot.

While her words were not wrong, they did not know how the General would react.

Before provocating others, Regis would prepare himself well against the opponent first.

However, the way Altina did things was bad for Regis' heart.

The General opened his mouth.

"You're ten years too early to talk about the empire with me. Just enter the formation."

"……"

Reluctantly, Altina saluted and stood at the very end of the formation.

*So he's not just a soldier…* Regis thought.

Probably because of his old age, the General did not react towards Altina's rebellious attitude. If that wasn't the case, it would be impossible for Regis and Altina to triumph over him.

Furthermore, Altina did not receive any reply to her words which basically means 'do not bring politics and private affairs into the military.'

Even so, he replied to the word ‘empire’. If they were of the same status, she would likely point out that Barguesonne was confusing the main point. However, Altina was arguing with a higher ranking General, which was why she was unable to use the point against him.

*What a cunning man he is.* Regis thought.

Regis had the impression of them being led on by the General.

An old strategist came forward and reported the situation.

“The High Britannia’s army had occupied Chaineboule’s harbour which was under the Trouin House. A force of thirty thousand had landed and the Second Imperial Army which was holding the line was defeated. Luckily, General Beaumarchais survived. The enemy split their forces into three, two of which are occupying the city and a fortress. The last unit is moving towards the capital. As to relief the emperor’s worry, we will crush the vicious enemy.”

The officers in the line began shouting things like “That’s right, that’s the way it should be!”.

*Should I respect the difference in culture between different regiment? Though I’m not used to it.* Regis thought while being a little uneasy. At the very least, he wanted to separate the information regarding the current situation and their fighting spirit.

However, the old strategist stood back into the line before they entered the main topic.

“After that, the head battle strategist will explain our plans. Second grade Admin Officer Vicente.”

“Yes!”

It seemed like the roles were distributed quite well. After the general situation was explained, another person stood out.

He was a young admin officer. Rather than having an impression of healthy youth, he looked more like a sickly person.

“I’ll be explaining the plans for the upcoming battle.”

“Hm…?”

Be it his name or his looks, Regis felt it was familiar.

Altina whispered to Regis.

“That Vicente, could he be someone you know when you’re in the military academy?”

“I think it’s him… “

It was only that one battle.

As the representative for his academy, Regis had a strategies debate with Vicente who was a cadet for another school.

Regis who never lost before within the school experienced his first defeat there.

While there were a few rumours, but a loss was a loss.

Never did Regis expected to see him again in here.

However, to Regis, there was nothing happier than seeing someone he knew being alive and healthy.

As per Vicente's instruction, a map was brought over.

The map depicted the current situation in the Empire. The Seventh Imperial Army who was staying at Rouen, including the Beilschmidt Border Regiment, was represented by the red pieces.

While the enemy which was at the south west was represented by blue pieces.

"According to scout reports, a ten thousand strong army is heading towards the capital. While the battlefield is different from the eastern frontline, our Seventh Imperial Army is twenty-five thousand strong. Just like always, nothing can prevent us from obtaining victory!"

The other soldiers let out powerful wail.

There was not much difference between what Regis got from the regiment and what was explained.

However, even against an army of ten thousand, the Empire's army have to consider about the enemy splitting their force into three.

The basics of war was to consider the number of soldiers one had and splitting the opponent's forces. However, what meaning was there to split their own army?

Regis then remembered a book he read before.

In Belgaria, books regarding wars and strategies were numerous. Searching through his library in his head, Regis began flipping through countless number of books.

Regis then had a doubt.

"Is the enemy really a force of ten thousand…?"

As he muttered those words, the place fell into silence.

The soldiers who were wailing earlier was now quiet.

By the time he realised, the soldiers were all looking at Regis.

*Oh no…*

As Regis was unaware, he accidentally muttered his words a little too loud.

Standing beside General Barguesonne, strategist Vicente was staring daggers at him.

"Fifth Grade Admin Officer, Regis Auric, what did you said? Just speak of what you have thought of. Even if it's an opinion of someone sitting at the end of the table, we will still hear it."

Even though Regis had not introduced himself, he got a scare when he was suddenly called by his rank and name.

Then again, it was nothing surprising that he knew about the commander and the essential people of the regiment who was coming under their command. After all, Vicente was the war advisor of the Seventh Imperial Army.

While Regis was not used to speaking in front of so many people, it was also his responsibilities to clear the doubts he had, leaving him no other choice.

“Although we obtained the information of the enemy splitting their force into three… The reason behind it was unclear as it was unconventional. Is the army coming towards the capital only ten thousand?”

“Ahh, could it be that you do not trust the report by our army?”

“I’m just a coward, which is why I can’t stop worrying…”

“If it’s about the other two forces, the Empire’s First Imperial Army of thirty thousand is already moving towards one of them. The one leading them is General Latreille. There’s no doubt that he would obtain victory. The remaining unit is occupying the harbour. Most likely, they are the reserves.”

“Out of thirty thousand, ten thousand of them are reserves…?”

“After all, they are occupying an unfamiliar place. It’s not surprising for them to prepare that much as a reserves. The enemy commander seems to be quite cautious.”

At the side of the large map, the west coast was included with three pieces representing the enemy.

Regis could see the enemy was moving towards the east like snakes.

That was the same for the Empire’s army. In response to them splitting their force, the northern line was the First Imperial Army led by Latreille while the southern line was this Seventh Imperial Army.

One piece represent a force of ten thousand. Each of the enemy units only had one.

In contrast, the Empire’s army had three for the northern line while the southern line had two. In addition, there were three for the reserves behind.

Even though they were called reserves, they were just units that were too slow to join up. There were various reasons for being slow like spending too much time preparing their army or pessimistic units that did not want to suffer losses.

No matter the reasons, there was a high chance the units that were late would be criticised later. If the Beilschmidt Border Regiment was held up by the Varden’s army, they would be included in the reserves.

Also, while the Empire had a hundred thousand intercepting the attack, there were only eight pieces.

Most likely, twenty thousand was lost as the Second Imperial Army in the west was decimated.

Regis focused on the large map.

“If the enemy at the northern line began marching southwards and the enemy behind moved forward, then the enemy would be concentrated at this Seventh Imperial Army. At that time, we would be facing a force of thirty thousand with twenty-five thousand men.”

As both sides included the supply teams, the actual soldiers were not that many.

Vicente snorted.

“It seems like you are still the same. This might happen and that might happen. You always said so timidly. Isn’t it impossible for the High Britannia’s Army to speed up their marching in this foreign land?”

It seemed like he remember Regis.

In an instant, the debate flashed in Regis’ brain for a moment.

However, this was not the time to reminisce those memories.

“Is that really so…? High Britannia army used the steamship to send their supplies and army. Even when the ship is filled with goods, they could still return here within ten days. When the enemy first landed, it was 23th April. Now, it’s already 16th May… Isn’t it better to consider them having better preparation than we expected? For example, having military horses?”

From the occupied Chainboule’s harbour to High Britannia’s harbour, the distance was about 150Li (666km)

A ship filled with supplies could travel 30Li (133km) a day.

It was even faster for a steamship.

Furthermore, one of the trip was when the steamship was empty.

Regis felt that it was dangerous to have the thoughts that the enemy only had thirty thousand infantry.

Vicente’s attitude was that of a teacher facing a useless student.

“It’s obvious that I had already considered the steamship capability, which was why I confirmed the force of thirty thousand. That is something you do not even need to ask.”

“Within Belgaria, we do not have any detailed information regarding the steamship. Or could it be that you managed to get some through some methods?”

“While the steamship could travel in a high speed even on windless condition, the central of the ship is occupied by the engine and coals. As such, a large space is used up, making the cargo small. At least, those are what I got.”

Even Belgaria had tried building a steamship.

The ship had something like a waterwheel at both sides. Even though it could work in windless condition, the space available for cargo was little. Furthermore, it required a large amount of coals. As such, the limited space was further taken up by the engine and coals. This was why they deemed it impractical.

Even the screw propeller required a hole for propulsion to be opened at the bottom. The Empire did not even try experimenting on it as it might result in accidents.

“Are you not concerned about the Empire…? I heard that recently, the propeller had been improved and that even a small size propeller could generate enough speed. With such technology available, shouldn’t we consider that the enemy is using this?”

The old propeller was designed with reference to manual power pushing the water back.

While the latest propeller was made by considering the power difference before and after the fan was turned on, which could be used to propel the ship.

This idea was most likely found while experimenting. The propeller that sunk and broke had a higher speed. People began to understand that compared to blades that were long like those oars, a shorter blades would result in a higher propulsion.

This happened a few years back, when they finally understood theories of similar nature.

This news was something Regis read in a book he bought this April while he was in the capital. It was included as a trivia in the book that was was sent to Fort Volks.

It was a book with oceans as it theme. The protagonist was a young pirate leader. In that book, the enemy was using the latest ship, which was the steamship equipped with new propeller by High Britannia.

As he would be scolded for saying his source, Regis decided to hide the truth.

“Hmph! Perhaps you can reveal your best plan to us!”

Using words like ‘reveal’ and ‘best’, Regis knew that exchange in the future would be tough. However, Altina’s standing would be lowered if he was to back down here.

More importantly, the way the Empire’s armies were proceeding was filled with dangers. Thinking that doing so could make him had the chance to change it, Regis started talking.

“I… Suggest that the Seventh Imperial Army marched north. As we linked up with the First Imperial Army, we would have a force of fifty thousand to fight against the enemy.”

The soldiers who were in line were becoming rowdy.

Vicente smirked.

“I see, so you’re trying to get an over-kill victory. However, what would happen to the defense of the capital?”

“Thirty thousand from the reserves should be enough to do so.”

“The reserves? If that’s the case, the final defense line would be close to the capital.”

“If we obtain victory, it doesn’t matter where the battle is.”

“I see. As expected of a commoner admin officer. Thinking that it’s fine as long as we win. You completely do not understand the nature of war!”

“Is that so…”

Regis did not deny it.

Vicente spoke eloquently.

“Belgaria as it is, we need to one sidedly overwhelm our enemy! To let the enemy approach the capital is something shameful that is not even allowed! Moreover, to let the enemy invade that deeply is due to us, the southern line! Are you really not trying to lower the Seventh Imperial Army’s reputation and prestige?!”

The soldiers all agreed with him.

*Looks like I’m not welcomed at all… If he is using reputation and prestige as reasons, there’s no other choice…* Regis thought.

“I understand… If we must have a victory here in the southern line, it’s best that we intercept them by taking the high grounds. The area around here have a few suitable hills to set the formation.”

Vicente considered it for a moment and nodded his head.

“I have thought of that too. The enemy is marching in the vast land of the Empire. Doing so will stretch their supply line, which is why they will be looking for a quick battle. Even when they are in a disadvantage, they will still attack us directly.”

“Isn’t it easier for us if we engage the enemy with us on higher grounds? In this case, it’s permissible, no?”

“That’s right, but this army is more suited for attack. The enemy have the latest model of guns and cannon. However! Using our superior numbers, we will not let them have the time to even use the cannons and decimate them! Isn’t this the way the strong Belgaria fights?!”

“… The right way of doing things.”

There was no flaw in his plan, which was why he thought nothing would go wrong… He was just following what the books said.

Precisely because of that, the enemy would have guessed his plan.

Since they had thought of the assault, what was the reason for them to proceed with ten thousand?

The answer was that the enemy had countermeasures for it.

*However, what is the reason behind them to think of getting victory despite having a smaller force? Could it be that they have confidence in their guns and cannons, or that they have something to turn the tide of war?*

*There’s not enough information.*

Even when Regis sent out scouts, he did not see any decisive action made by the enemy.

Even towards allies, he also sent scouts to check their strengths, though not to the extent of the whole empire.

Having a wrong information was more dangerous than having no information.

It was not easy to increase the number of scouts who could produce accurate information. One needs to be brave, skilled, knowledgeable, loyal and many other criterias. In addition, they would not earn any fame. For the stars in the battlefield, it would be the cavalry and infantry that formed the vanguard.

Seeing that the conversation between Regis and Vicente had ended, General Barguesonne raised one of his hand.

The senior officers returned back to their originally posture.

The old commander sat on the chair and said.

“We will be using war advisor Vicente’s plan.”

After that, captains of each units were called and given their roles.

*They are not going to put the Beilschmidt Border Regiment at the forefront, are they?* Regis thought while worrying as Altina was called last.

“Major General Belgaria, you are situated at the very back. Just sit back and have a look what war is.”

“Understood.”

Altina saluted.

The soldiers around them could not stop themselves from laughing.

To them, this battle was another victory to claim. Belgaria was not only strong, but also had numerous soldiers. Even if the enemy was equipped with the latest model of guns and cannons, it was hard for them to imagine they would lose.

Since they determined that they would win, the way they looked at how the formation was set would change.

Most likely, the Seventh Imperial Army's officers had already viewed the enemy as a fish on the chopping board. Outsiders were to stand far away while they devoured the enemy without leaving anything to them—which was how they sneered at the Beilschmidt Border Regiment.

To Regis, the enemy was not the only one on a chopping board……

Altina faced the soldiers who had stood in line.

"We don't have any intention to intervene though, However, it's fine if you asked for help when you are losing, we won't be just sitting there doing nothing."

"Hmph, there's no need for it, Arrow-sparrow Princess, you can return to the north empty-handed!"

The one who was scorning her was the messenger from earlier.

Apparently, he was a battalion commander.

*It have been awhile since I last heard the outdated nickname of Altina.*

*That reminds me, have brother-in-law entered the Empire's Art Museum safely? He wanted to look at the painting of the original sword quickly. If that's the case, he should have left the city this morning.*

While pondering about useless things, Regis raised his hand.

"…I think that the enemy have some ulterior motive, hence I suggest that increasing the number of scouts."

"Motive, is it? Can you say what it is?"

Vicente asked back with a dull tone.

Regis did not back down.

"That, I do not know, but I believe that it's better to be cautious while predicting the enemy."

"Ha, for a strategist to say 'I do not know' so easily…"

*Would it be better if I acted as if I knew? Well,now I should just leave aside whether what's right or wrong for a strategist*

"Then, war advisor Vicente, can you deduce the enemy's intent?"

Towards Regis' question, Vicente had a vague smile.

"The High Britannia Army invaded because of their latest model of guns and cannons. If that's the case, their tactics would revolve around similar concept, that's common sense. As such, they would have plans to effectively use their weapons, especially the cannons which is more suited on bombarding thousands of soldiers. However, the enemy is not used to large-scale battle. In front of the hundred thousand strong Empire's army, the soldiers would run away before even firing their cannons. Taking in the consideration of their prided weapons and the soldiers' psychological state, the enemy commander split their force as to conduct battles in a smaller scale, is what I think."

He was good with his words.

Hearing Vicente's explanation, the General and the other officers all showed a face of agreement.

The soldiers shouted things like "As expected of the war advisor!" and "First-class war advisor!"

Just as Regis was about to say something, Vicente continued his words first.

"Fifth grade admin officer, Regis Auric, it would affect the morale of the army if your cowardice spread. Please be careful of what you are going to say."

"Understood…"

Since his superior had already said that, he had no other choice but to abide.

Regis saluted and add on to his words.

"The Beilschmidt Border Regiment will standby at the very back and will not be a hindrance to our allies."

The other officers laughed uncontrollably as if they were seeing new recruits.

Barguesonne nodded his head.

After the war council with the Seventh Imperial Army proceeded with the main topic.

Pata! Altina kicked on a stone, causing it to roll down.

The stone which was the size of a fist flew as if a catapult threw it.

Regis shrugged his shoulders.

"Experimenting new weapons…?"

"Ahhh, how frustrating!"

They had left the Seventh Imperial Army' camp and were on their way back to the regiment's camp.

While the guards were with them, they were at a distance in which they could not hear anything unless it was spoken loudly.

Even so, they were surrounded by the Empire's armies and it was funny that they maintained a distance outside the range of archers.

Altina kicked another stone.

"What do those guys want! That kind of war council, they might as well directly order us to standby at the back! They called us there even though they do not have any intention to discuss with us!"

"Well… it's true they have no intention to discuss…"

While words seemed to have exchanged between them, no actual conversation was made. In the first place, they had already determined which course to take and was bounded to reject Altina and Regis' opinions.

"They are taking us as fools!"

“Well, they are taking us lightly… Most likely, they will give us the chance to speak our opinions, but will not consider anything at all… Isn’t a piece of mind is what they wanted?”

“What meaning is there in that?!”

In such council where they were being rejected, it was just a waste of time and effort to both sides.

Even though the other party also knew this.

“Perhaps… it’s unfortunate for both us and them… The people from Seventh Imperial Army are not aware that they have set their mind on rejecting any proposals.”

“Ha?”

Altina had a stunned look.

It was clear that they were oblivious from the way they rejected Regis’ ideas wholesale.

“While having a conversation with others, it would agonized oneself if he changed his train of thoughts according to what was exchanged between them. Them thinking that ‘the exchange was eye-opening, causing them to change their views’ is just an illusion… That illusion, if someone had the same opinions as them, they would accept him with a completely different expression. After all, humans would be happy if their actions are accepted by others.”

“Well, even I understand that…”

“If it’s the opposite and they accept opinions different from theirs, it would be self-denial and is the same as destroying a part of their thoughts. These kind of actions obviously would be hated.”

“Is that so? Though I quite like listening to your opinions?!”

“That was just me answering some of your doubts. If doubts were to melt like ice, you would be happier… If that’s not the case and you have a strong belief, you would have a hard time accepting my opinion that was different from yours. For example, when I stopped you when you said you want to be the empress, when I stopped you from having a duel with Sir Jerome, when you suggested attacking Fort Volk—”

“Ahhh, enough, I understand! How excruciating, I can’t take it!”

Altina shook her hands.

“Well… Despite what I said… I can still converse with you.”

“Ah, is that so? Why is that so?”

“Just like the pain received from parts of their thoughts being destroyed, it is to accept others’ viewpoints and exchange ideals. Though there is a prerequisite of respecting that the conversing partner is more outstanding. At the very least, one must accept the fact that others are more outstanding than yourself in some ways. If one believes he could learn something from it, he would listen to their opinions. Even though if he had to suffer through the pain of self-denial, he could still accept it.”

Ahhh, Altina widen her eyes.

The respectful look that Regis mentioned should looked like this.

Regis was embarrassed from being looked like this by a girl who was four years younger than him.

“As expected of Regis!”

“Thank you…”

“In short, they are denying us because they are underestimating us!”

“That is so. This isn’t just limited to conversation, it goes the same to reading books. If one believe that the content is boring while reading books, all the books would be boring to him. Conversely, if one believe there is something to gain from while reading… Ahh, well, most likely…”

“What is it?”

“No, it’s nothing. After all, there are all kind of books in this world…”

Regis remembered all sort of things.

Altina sighed.

“Is it because my mother is a commoner…? Even though that is unnecessary, it was denied… “

“There’s that… But I think that isn’t the only reason.”

“Eh? Then, is it because I’m a girl or that I’m underaged?”

There were those too.

However, Regis believed that those were not the essential points.

“Other than themselves, they would look down on anyone else.”

“How? What about Latreille?”

“For people like him, he is placed under the ‘special’ category by them. If they were to rank them, it would be “special’, ‘their own clique’, followed by ‘others’

Strictly speaking, there should be ranking even within the ‘insiders’ and ‘special’ category.

Altina furrowed her brow as she did not understand that.

“That special ranking would be something similar to the ranks within the military or nobles’ titles.”

“I believe that they are not aware that they are looking down on others or that they are evaluating themselves too highly……When comrades are unchanging, in that efficient organisation, in the process of confirming and accepting their comrades, they denied anyone else.”

“It isn’t bad to accept and confirm one’s friends. But for them to deny others, what exactly happened?”

“Let’s see, for example, don’t you dislike the Seventh Imperial Army? Thinking that they are wrong?”

“Of course!”

“For those in the Beilschmidt Border Regiment, you will have a different view. You’re likely to evaluate them highly and think that they are the best, right?”

“I guess so.”

“Then… what if someone else appeared and denied your comrades’ opinions, how would you feel?”

“That… Ah?!”

While Altina was straightforward, she was not brainless.

From the conversation, she seemed to realised she had committed the same mistake as others.

She frowned.

“Between us, we had experienced various things that strengthen our relations. However, that could not be used as a reason to deny others.”

“You’re right… While I believe my comrades and evaluate them highly, to think that I deny others because of that… That’s too strange.”

“It’s wrong to one-sidedly judge others. It’s strange, isn’t it? Even though we are supposed to be impartial between the opinions and the person suggesting it.”

“Is that so?”

“Well… It’s a fact that it’s common for people to think that the words of others are wrong. While it’s regrettable, such authoritative way of thinking should be rejected when conversing with others.”

“Should be denied? But between Regis and others’ opinions, isn’t it obvious that I would put more weight on one side than the other?”

“As a human, that might be natural… However, to me, regardless who the person is, I tend to treat the opinion equally. That is what I wish to view things with. Though, this can also be called as the philosophy of Enlightenment.”

“Regardless of the person and treat their opinions equally… Does this applies to both emperor or commoner?”

“Yes, that’s right. Though such theories is only found within books… Among those enlightenment philosophers, there is one who even entered into deep discussion from just his dog barking… Though he was stopped by his assistant.”

“Is that so… Hey, Regis, even you think that isn’t good, right?”

Altina had a look as if she was looking at a sick person.

*How regrettable…*

*Even though it was a good anecdote…*

“Compared to someone like me, perhaps a dog barking somewhere might even have better views.”

“That isn’t enlightenment! It’s just something your sister imprinted on you?!”

18th May, dusk.

Regis obtained information that the northern unit of ten thousand force that was proceeding east was now moving south.

Regis' concerns came true.

However, the Seventh Imperial Army's war advisor did not agree on changing the battle location.

"While the enemy's intention is clear, they would not be able to link up at the southern line if we disrupted their plan. Our victory remain firm!"

According to him, the estimated time for the enemy to link up was two days later.

Furthermore, in the southern defense line, the distance between the enemy and them was just half a day.

He believed that tomorrow would be the clash.

Vicente said.

"The Seventh Imperial Army, on 19th, which is tomorrow, will cut through the enemy. After that, we will face the enemy unit coming south on the 20th. We will coordinate with General Latreille's First Imperial Army and do a pincer attack! We will decimate the enemy!"

Regis could not not stop worrying.

"If would be ideal if things go according to plan. However, is it even possible for the enemy to do something akin to jumping into their graves?"

As he continued to wait for information to come, he kept feeling the upcoming dangers.

However, the him right now, let aside the imperial army, he did not have the authority to change the course the Seventh Imperial Army was proceeding.

The ten thousand unit in Chainboule's harbour did not move.

However he received words that there were six military vessels in the sea. Those ships did not look like transport ships. Most likely, those ships were heading towards the Empire.

There was even an operations to sink those ships.

Trouin's naval battle.

The large sailing ship, Ateluna, which was Belgaria's pride with eighty cannons as the flagship, twenty-four ships fleet launch an attack on High Britannia.

Aterna class ships was 40Co (18m) in length and had three masts.

The ship had three layers of gundeck, making it looked like a castle wall with eighty cannons on its broadside spread over three layers. The cannons used were not only super sized ones, they could fire exploding shells and canister shots.

The canister shot were shells that would explode into shrapnels and caused great damage. Though the accuracy and range was lower than normal.

The ship used the biggest cannon, which had the best firepower in the Empire. However, the cannon was the muzzle-loading smoothbore gun type, which was outdated when compared to the enemy's weapon.

The High Britannia's navy, also known as the 'Queen's Navy', was the first among the neighbouring countries to use the latest technologies into weaponry.

The ships escorting the supply ships were six Princess class steamships that were equipped with seventy-four cannons. Though not all of them were equipped with Type 41 Elswick Cannon.

Be it the range, power or speed, the enemy was better in all aspect.

13th May, Belgaria predicted the supply line used by the enemy and stationed an unit to ambush them with wind on their side.

The preparation was near perfect… However, in their fight against the world's strongest ship, the inferior Belgaria's force had to retreat without achieving anything.

It was a complete defeat.

Belgaria decided to use the precious Poseidon Class armoured ship that could hold up to hundred and twenty cannons. This ship was usually ridiculed as the floating fort for its low speed. Just entering the battle took up a lot of time.

For the time being, no reinforcement was expected to come from the sea.

It was a cloudy day as if it was going to rain.

Empire 851, 19th May

Twenty-two thousand empire's soldiers were stationed at a hill somewhere at the Lafressange area. While the supply teams were sent to the back of the battlefield to stand by.

Belgaria's infantry units, if they continued to let musketeers as the vanguard, would only widen the gap in gun's performance and hindered their own assault.

The infantry were not the key to victory in this battle.

That was because it was that reason for the defeat of Second Imperial Army at Lafressange. This time, the vanguard consisted of those equipped with spears. They were spread out like a carpet on the hills.

Afternoon,

Below the hills, about 50Ar (3573m) away from them, the enemy of ten thousand approached. At the forefront were the line infantry. Their guns, the Snider, was excellent for its consecutive shooting and was all-weather. The gun was so good that in the time the empire's soldiers shot once, they could shoot up to three times.

Behind them stood soldiers holding large shields. It was a common tactic of preparing against any incoming spearmen in close combat.

Behind the shieldbearers who stood like a wall were the artillery unit. There were about two hundred Type 41 Elswick Cannon. Coupled with the shield-wall, it looked like a moving fortress.

From the Second Imperial Army's defeat, they knew that the range of the cannon was about 45Ar (3216m).

By maintaining the current distance, the cannons would not reach.

When aiming at a higher place, they need to be closer than the distance used for aiming at flatlands.

Conversely, if they were stationed at higher ground, the distance could even increase… However, the regrettable thing was that the cannons the Seventh Imperial Army had was the medium Empire's cannons which could only shoot no further than 28Ar (2000m).

Even the Type 41 at the foot of the hills could shoot further than that of the Empire's cannons.

Slightly further away at the back of the Seventh Imperial Army, the Beilschmidt Border Regiment was stationed there. Excluding the supply team, they had about three thousand soldiers.

This time, the headquarter were at the front of the formation.Other than Altina who was wearing heavy armour on this rare occasion and Regis who was dressed as usual, Jerome who was fully armoured was also standing here.

"Hmph, Those cannons which can't even hit the enemy would only be a hindrance. Why did they even bother taking those out."

"That's because the strategist for the Seventh Imperial Army likes to follow what the books said."

However, those textbooks did not mention about how to deploy the soldiers when the enemy was using cannons that were vastly superior.

Jerome sarcastically asked, "Do you like the textbooks too?"

"Yes… While I like those textbooks, I won't follow exactly what the books said."

"Ah?"

"Be it attacking or defending, I believe that the crucial thing is not letting the enemy know my intent… That's because the enemy would fear and panic if he do not know what his opponent is doing, neither could he do a proper countermeasurement."

"That's exactly the case."

"While what was written on the textbooks are true… Those happened without any unforeseen situations. No matter how small an unexpected thing occurred, it could greatly affect the strategy."

"Hmph…"

Jerome had a smile on his face which rarely occurred.

If one listen tentatively to their conversation about strategies, one would realised that the topic had broaden and include various things other than strategies.

Ah, Altina exclaimed.

"Is that them moving?!"

"It seems to have started…"

Regis shifted his sight to the front and nodded his head.

In response to the enemy who was gradually approaching, the Seventh Imperial Army began to move.

With a force of nineteen thousand, they did not rushed an assault but was moving in a marching pace.

Altina tilted her head.

"If that's the case, won't they just get shot?"

“It couldn’t be help… Even if they ran down the hills, the soldiers could only run at full speed up to 5Ar (357m) at best. While they can’t move leisurely, they would only tire themselves out if they ran without caring about their stamina. If they were slow within the enemy musketeers’ range, the damage caused would be larger than that of the cannons.”

“I see!”

Thinking about it, this was her first time participating in a large scale battle on open grounds.

As the Beilschmidt Border Regiment had the Black Knights Corps which was under the hero Jerome, many of their strategies had the cavalry as the core. The regiment did not have large number of infantry either.

“Take a good look at it, Altina. The Seventh Imperial Army is one of the few who excel in using infantry”

“Well, even the General said ‘*Take a good look what’s a battle is like*’.”

“It would be nice if all we have to do is watch…”

The back of the Seventh Imperial Army who was marching was gradually shrinking.

“Do you think they can win?”

“If it’s just a frontal clash… If the cannons and musketeers were cut down by half, even with weapons made with the latest alloy, the experienced Seventh Imperial Army would not lose… However…”

“However?”

“The enemy commander should know these too… It’s impossible for them not to have any countermeasurement.”

If things were to continue proceeding like this, it would be like how Vicente said, the Seventh Imperial Army would break through the enemy and could do a pincer attack on the unit marching south, achieving a major victory.

If that was the case, Regis who kept saying worrying words would only end up being branded as a coward and be criticised.

However, the enemy attacked the harbour right after their queen was crowned. Furthermore, they even urged the neighbouring countries to attack the Empire. As the enemy commander was that competent, it was hard to imagine him ordering such a cruel and thoughtless clash that would decimate his frontlines.

Altina tilted her head.

“Are there ambushing units?”

“There’s no ambush… I believe that the Seventh Imperial Army’s scouting the enemy was properly carried out. They even had intelligence to confirm it.”

Speaking about intelligence, Regis brought up another topic.

“I already investigated the commander for the unit marching south… He seems to be called Colonel Oswald Coulthard. In the Empire, he would be equivalent to a first grade combat officer. He’s rank is not very high and he is rather young. Are their generals following to his commands?”

“Not a strategist?”

“That’s right. Even if their position is lower, they can still devise plans. That’s is usually the position for strategists and advisors. According to the reports, that man called Oswald seems to have the authority to give out orders.”

“If that’s the case, he should be the commander.”

“Yes. Though officially, the commander is an old General.”

Oswald’s title seemed to be advisor.

“I do not understand. What could be the reason behind this? Could he be a noble?”

The difference between the military ranks and nobility was that the army command chain followed the military ranks… Even though that was the case, the two were usually mixed together.

Especially in Belgaria, where the nobles’ armies exist. There was even times when nobility titles took precedence over the military ranking.

In the case of High Britannia, there was no nobles’ armies. Neither had there be any news of nobles granted the authority to command the army.

The reason for Oswald being the de facto commander was unclear.

“I’m currently looking into his identity… Also, while this isn’t confirmed, the new queen, Margaret Steelart, is also here.”

“Eh?!!”

“Well, while there are emperors in the Empire coming into the frontline, High Britannia is ruled by a queen for generations. As such, this is something that rarely occurs.”

“If that’s true, she seems to be proactive. I want to meet her.”

“At the very least, when it’s more peaceful…”

“I wonder how’s her swordsmanship?!”

Altina was rather happy as she felt that she met an opponent that was similar to her.

Regis gave a wry smile.

“I believe she’s not that type…”

Most likely, Belgaria’s royalties were special. There were no rumours or news that the High Britannia’s royalties possess extraordinary strengths.

“Anyway, the enemy unit at the southern front was regular army while most of the unit marching southwards seems to be mercenaries… Normally, the core of an army is the regulars with mercenaries being the minority… Perhaps they have a reason to do so like this?”

“Do you know why?”

“Hm… While an unit that only have regulars are expensive, they can cooperate with others without a problem. Even though the mercenaries are powerful in single combat… For the northern front unit to be delayed by the mercenaries… There is… No, that wrong, there isn’t a chance for them to lose….”

“Really?”

“While that unit is filled with mercenaries, but their commander seems to to be Gilbert Schweinzeberg who holds the title of ‘Mercenary King’.”

Hearing this name, Altina was displeased as she furrowed her brow.

She seemed to remember Eric getting injured and the sword being damaged.

“Huh, aren’t they Germania Federation’s mercenaries?”

“Precisely that they are mercenary, they will work for anyone as long as the rewards is good. According to reports, the northern front unit had Renard Pendu as the core. Compared to those normal commanders, they are concrete. It’s hard to imagine them getting the timing wrong.”

“Even so, not all of the Renard Pendu was hired, right?”

“Yes. While I’m not sure of the scale of the mercenaries, but Renard Pendu members are about a thousand? The rest of the nine thousand are likely to be some other groups.”

“Will they listen to him?”

Altina had a point. Even if Gilbert was the commander, not all mercenaries would follow his commands.

“… However, it would be fine even if their units in the south move northwards. They are orderly and easy to estimate their movement speed, but they should be able to handle it.”

“They really didn’t mess up somewhere?”

“For someone commanding a force of thirty thousand… I can’t imagine him making a mistake like this.”

“However, they didn’t manage to link up.”

“There’s that…”

The war had already began.

Cannons began to fire.

The roar of the cannons reverberate through the air

The Seventh Imperial Army could only receive the enemy attack one-sidedly.

The enemy began firing when they were about 40Ar (2858m) away. To shorten that distance, the Seventh Imperial Army would need another twenty minutes.

Among the infantry, this was called a ‘marché de la mort’ (Death March).

The shells of the Type 41 Elswick Cannons that the High Britannia used came flying towards them. The shell size was about a child’s brain. If they took a direct hit, the empire’s soldier would definitely be blown into smithereens.

It was a merciless sight. The soldiers who received the cannons were blown into pieces. Even the soldiers around them were affected by the shockwave.

In this era, soldiers were lined closely to one another without any gaps. Even when they march, they looked like a wall moving forward.

If they ever move with spaces in between them and that the enemy were concentrated, it would become a situation where a soldier have to face two or three enemy at a time.

As to prevent that from happening, there was a need to line them closely.

While the shells that could even break apart walls came flying towards them.

The damage caused by the shells were not just the injuries. The exploding sound, the cries of their comrades, the fear of death, these were slowly chipping away their will.

There were people who wished that they faster approached the enemy, some who slowed down due to fear. However, the formation that was on a verge of collapsing managed to maintain a certain pace as the strategically placed captains of each corps scolded them from behind.

They were really top-notch.

The opponents of the Seventh Imperial Army were usually small countries like Estaburg Kingdom. Though the battle were not relaxing either, these countries did not have the latest cannons. Even when facing an unknown threat, the soldiers continued to march on.

Belgaria's army also began to fire their cannons.

The distance between the two armies was gradually shrinking.

The enemy seemed to remain still. As the Beilschmidt Border Regiment was at the back, they could not see clearly, but there were no one escaping nor moving forward.

Most likely, they were trying to gain some time as to link up with the northern front unit.

About 25Ar (1787m) away—

It looked as if they were sieging a fort.

Even if the cannons were the latest models, it could not shoot accurately at a long distance. However, no matter where the shells hit the Empire's soldiers, it would produce large damage.

Soldiers who were praying while marching turned into many bloody pieces the next moment.

Even the captains urging the troops on were blown into smithereens.

Limbs of their comrades were flying everywhere and those that were hit and fallen down was trampled to death by their comrades behind.

Even so, the soldiers continue to march over their comrades' corpses while under the bombardment.

The Beilschmidt Border Regiment under Altina, as if following the Seventh Imperial Army, continued to survey the battlefield from higher grounds.

"Argh… "

Altina covered her mouth.

She looked like she was holding back her vomit and tears were forming at the corners of her eyes.

As the distance had increased, one should not be able to see the scene clearly. Probably, Altina had better sight than a normal civilian.

Regis also swallowed his urge to vomit back.

They could not display any weakness in front of the soldiers. Leaving aside Regis, Altina need to have a resolute look for the soldiers.

"…… Is this your first time seeing this?"

"It's my first time seeing such terrifying scene…"

"Ahhh,I guess so."

"You're fine, Regis?"

"Do I looked like fine…?"

Even though he did not seem shaken, he could not stop trembling after reaching the battlefield.

Even without the latest cannons, the battlefield was a tragic scene that was always filled with death.

People were dying at this moment— This terrifying fact made their throats parched.

Even if one would yelled in a city, they would not be able to be calm as they were on the battlefield.

Regardless of who, death would always be terrifying, sudden and fatal.

Even the ash carried the stench of blood. The death of someone seemed to have mixed with the air and entered their body, making even breathing difficult for them.

Bang! Jerome simply dissipated this gloomy atmosphere.

"Stop panicking at something like this! Humans, no matter where and when, would eventually die! It's just a matter of time!"

"Well… Even if that's the case…"

"If one keep remembering such a boring scene, one would eventually join their side."

"Understood…"

Regis shook his head.

*I can't be swallowed by the atmosphere. If I made a mistake as a strategist, many soldiers and Altina could die. I must think…*

As Regis' hand was trembling due to fear and being nervous, Altina stretch her hand out and placed it ontop of his hand.

She then held onto his fingers.

"Regis…"

"Eh? T-that… Altina…?"

Even though the guards were at a distance where they could not hear anything— They would be able to understand from just seeing what they were doing. Seeing them holding hands, what could they be thinking?

If rumours began to spread, it would affect the troops' morale.

With sincere eyes, Altina looked at him.

*She is really a beautiful girl.*

*Even her hands are warm.*

"Regis, I'm fine… It's fine to think after calming yourself first."

"Ahh… understood."

Even though he was about to lose his calm, thanks to Jerome's shout and Altina's trust, he managed to suppress them.

Regis took a deep breathe. *Even if the air is filled with death, we have to breathe in order to survive. To let everyone able to go back.*

Regis began to calm down.

"I think that the enemy have some secret counter measurement… We would lose if we continued to stay here and look."

However, they would not be able to move without seeing through the enemy's plan.

Regis looked at the battlefield once more.

He barely managed to forget about the scene of soldiers dying.

Just like looking at a chessboard, emotionless and calm……

The Seventh Imperial Army who was moving down the hill had a formation like a carpet being spread was now in a messy state as if they were bitten by bugs. Their number should be around sixteen thousand.

The ten thousand High Britannia's soldiers had a semi-circle formation. The cannons were slowly moved to the back. Even as to maintain a minimum range, the cannons could still hit the Seventh Imperial Army.

The front of the enemy formation were the prepared musketeers and behind them were shieldbearers. After the cannons retreated back, the musketeers began to move forward.

There should be some meaning behind such changes.

The enemy's headquarter should be at the centre of their formation. The place where heavy infantry were guarding.

Regis were searching the bookshelves within his brain.

He flipped through many books.

Even so, there were no books that used the latest model of guns and cannons.

"Not this… However… that shape… Where … did I see it before…?"

Regis muttered with pauses in between.

Altina kept clenching her hands.

While Jerome was waiting in silence.

Ever since the battle began, Regis flipped through the books he read before as to assert the enemy's actions. However, he could not find anything regarding the latest guns and cannons.

*As expected, there's nothing?*

Regis did not know any strategies regarding those weapons. What was not known was not known.

"But… I… Where…. Ah?! T-that's right! — Magic!"

"Eh? Regis?"

Towards Altina who had her eyes widen, Regis had a serious expression and said

"— I am the Legendary Wizard, that!"

"What are you saying, Regis?! Are you fine?!"

"Ah, no, there's a work called that. 'I am the Legendary Wizard' is written by Olenburke. While the author's selling point is his whimsical works, the Magic Nation Army in his works used the same formation as them."

"H-hmm?"

Suddenly hearing about magic, Altina tilted her head while being uneasy.

Jerome looked at Regis as if he was looking at dirt.

"Oi, Regis! That thing, can it be used on the battlefield? To me, I would even use dirt if it's useful. If not, I would throw them into the fire!"

"Ahh… Of course it can be used. Leaving aside the origin, the basic is not wrong. As time is precious, I will be explaining while moving. Ah, though the carriage will be at the back together with the supply teams."

The luxurious carriage and Clarisse were entrusted to the supply corp.

Regis did not ride any horse.

As he was not confident in his horse-riding skill, he could only move together with the soldiers. It could not be help that he had to do so in order to explain to Altina and Jerome who were both riding a horse.

*Since I'm not equipped with any weapons or armour, I should be able to do that. Probably.*

Altina pulled her horse over.

"Then, you can ride on my Karakara!"

"That's the horse's name?!"

"Yup, isn't it cute?!"

"Ahh, yeah… Though, won't it be troublesome if you let me ride it…?"

Regis was not speaking fluently anymore.

Even Jerome had rarely agreed with Altina.

“Let’s do that! As the princess does not have her sword, even while using a sword she is not used to will only be a hindrance. She can just ride with you and watch at the back.”

“T-t,then… A-at least… at the back…”

If he was to let it be, they would be stationed at the front.

*If the soldiers see this, it will be troublesome if rumours began to spread*— Regis nodded his head despite thinking so.

“Understood, Then, please take of me, Altina. I will explain while moving.”

“Okay!”

“Oi, Regis! Is it fine to advance?!”

“Yes. Half way down the hill— we are going to do a detour around the place where the shells are going to hit.Though from which side, I will decide it after five minutes. For now, we just advance.”

“Five minutes? Tch, I really don’t get you!”

Despite him complaining, Jerome continued to mount his horse and waved his spear, 'Le Cheveu D'une Dame' (Dame’s hair).

“Oryah! Fellows! The afternoon nap is over! Onwards!”

There were many soldiers who thought they would continue being on standby, so their reaction was slow.

“Oh,Oryah—!!”

“Ha! The strategist had said something like ‘I’m a Wizard’! Hurry up if you do not wish to be turned into a frog! Follow the princess!!”

Cheers erupted.

A rumour existed since long ago— The barbarian’s defeat, capturing Fort Volk and setting fire to a swamp as to burn the knights, were not those things that only a monster or a Wizard could achieve?

Since long ago, Belgaria believed in a certain monolithic religion. Within their scripture, it was recorded that ‘Monster’ was considered the enemy of God while ‘Wizard’ was a sage that would lead the believers.

However, the sage did not only give advice, but also mete out punishments to traitors.

Many of the soldiers were told that they would turned into frogs by the Wizard since young.

In a religious world, that was the case.

— In fictional entertainment works, things like ‘Dragon Lightning’ and black beams of light ‘Negative Burst’ were techniques Overlords could use.

To many of the soldiers here, the Wizard refers to the one in the holy scripture.

As it was Jerome who never joked before said it, many religious soldiers paled.

They secretly whispered among themselves like “Is that true?!”,”So he’s actually a Wizard.” or “As expected!”

“Wait?! That’s just a title of a book……!!”

Regis who wanted to clear the misunderstanding up was carried up the horse like cargo.

It was the same as last time.

Altina heaved him up just with her wrist. Since he had mounted, he could only grab on to the horse. Altina got up shortly after.

“Aren’t you used to it!”

“That, I think that the way we ride are different?”

Even though he denied it in a soft voice, it seemed like Altina did not hear it.

Altina shouted on her horse.

“Is everyone prepared?!”

“Oh—!!”

This time, the soldiers shouted uniformly.

“The enemy seems to be scheming something! However, Regis would help us on the difficult part! Bring forth your courage and march forward!!”

“Ohh—!!”

Altina pushed everything aside and drew the sword on her waist— She pointed towards the front.

She lightly tighten her legs on the horse’s waist, causing the chestnut war horse, Karakara, to move.

What was blocking Regis’ view was not just the horse’s head, but also the battlefield in front of them.

Next to the large hills was a plains. Dust rolled behind the back of the brave soldiers.

The horse increased its speed.

Three thousand soldiers were behind them.

Jerome’s horse was beside them as Jerome was gathering the Black Knights Corps who were outside.

The cheering sounds and the clopping of the horse resounded in the area.

Regis could feel his heart was beating even faster.

# Chapter 4: The Beginning of Dusk

The groan and howl of the cannon blasts echoed through the battlefield.

High Britannia to the south— the First Division continued firing their artillery.

However, the Seventh Imperial Army did not slow down their march.

They were already within 1000yd (914m) from the enemy.

Even so, it was still too far for rifles.

If they fired upwards at an angle, the bullets might reach the enemy. However, bullets flying in an arc would be unable to kill the enemy soldiers equipped with armour.

Compared to the old musket, the new Snider rifle had increased range, though it was only increased to 200yd (182m)

No one knew how many volleys they could fire in the face of the incoming imperial soldiers.

The enemy was closing the gap.

The enemy seemed to have turned into angry beasts, wanting vengeance for their comrades killed by cannons. Their killing intent seemed to morph into a fearsome shadow.

In addition, the imperial soldiers still outnumbered them despite the cannons thinning their numbers by thousands.

Even the new Type 41 Elswick Cannons were not omnipotent. If the enemy was too close to the frontline, they would not be able to use the cannons in fear of hitting their own troop.

For the shells to be fired, the minimum range was about 500yd (457m)

In addition, any slight change to the elevation could cause the rounds to hit their own troop. Also, it took time to adjust the distance due to its bulky weight.

They could now see the enemy, who looked liked demons, up close..

They overcome death just to bring death to their enemies.

Trumpets sounded.

The captains of each platoons began giving out orders.

“Ready your rifles, aim——!!”

The riflemen at the front began to aim at the approaching targets.

Before that, they had to load their rifle.

They opened the hinged breechblock to reveal the breech. A metallic cartridge was placed in here.

The loading would be complete after one confirmed that the breechblock was closed and secured, thus they could began to aim

The simple procedure was totally different compared to the old muskets.

They took aim at the imperial soldiers.

Compared to their training, the guns felt heavier and their hands were trembling, making it hard to aim properly.

The more they kill, the lesser the guilt they would feel. A vast majority believed that foreigners were no different from beasts. The fear of being killed if they did not kill took their calmness away.

The imperial army continued to march on.

*When is the order to fire going to come?*

Once they readied their guns, the soldiers were not allowed to even wipe their sweat on their forehead.

Behind the riflemen was the headquarter for the High Britannia First Division.

There was a man dressed like a white knight. He was tall with long limbs. His grey hair had bits of blue while his eyes were pale blue.

His right wrist was bandaged, which he hid inside the sleeve of his uniform.

He was Oswald Coulthard.

Officially, he was a staff officer, but he was acting as if he was the commander.

He nodded his head while listening to his subordinate's report.

"It's seems to be going smoothly…… Then, as according to plan, we will begin firing at a distance of 200yd (182m). If the imperial army begin charging before that distance, do not panic and simply shoot at them calmly."

Even towards his subordinates, Oswald spoke using a courteous tone.

"Understood!"

The messenger saluted by bringing his right hand to the edge of his temple, after which he ran to the frontline.

Though they were other generals and staffs in the headquarter, they could only looked at the enemy nervously. They were not that useful. However, if they could fulfill their roles, they would be meaningful pawns for Oswald.

The battle was heading towards an ideal situation.

The time to decide who would be the victor was approaching.

At that moment, someone behind him called his name.

"Hey, Oswald…… Aren't they going to shoot?"

It was said lazily.

Behind him was a two-seater light carriage. Even though a human could pull it, it was being pulled by a horse right now. It was actually an open-air carriage

The carriage was painted black as not to attract attention. If one saw the silver ornaments and silk within, they would know the one sitting in the carriage was someone important.

As if she was sitting on a sofa, a beautiful girl sat with one of her knee on the seat.

The pink dress was rolled back, revealing her white thighs. As the dress was quite revealing at the shoulders and chest area, a white mantle was draped over it.

Just like a waterfall, her shiny black hair covered the white mantle which hid her chest.

The young girl who slightly narrowed her amber eyes had the look of a mischievous cat.

She was High Britannia's new queen, Margaret Steelart.

"I feel that it's about time to fire, Oswald. The new guns should be able to hit them. I'm already sick of hearing the cannon blasts."

While it was within their range, it did not mean that it would hit. They would not be able to kill the enemy if they could not hit them properly. After all, the distance was still a little too far.

The latest gun had two flaws—— the metallic ammunition required more effort to manufacture, hence the reserve for it was quite low. Secondly, the barrel of the gun had a spiral pattern and because of the thickness of the ammunition, the round would graze the inside of the barrel, so the durability of the gun was slightly inferior to past models.

Bullets were valuable. Be it the guns or cannons, any misaim would lower the chance of killing the enemy.

Until the enemy approached , to ensure maximum damage, they needed to avoid meaningless volleys. Hence, the order to fire would only be given when the enemy drew closer.

Just because she was tired of the sound of shooting. What kind of reason was this…?

Oswald politely lowered his head.

"Firing, is it? That's indeed a smart decision. The wise Queen Margaret's orders are like the heaven's decrees. To a foolish person like me, your words are akin to illuminating the path in the darkness. That's right, if I was to compare, it would be like noticing the brilliance of the lighthouse on a moonless and starless night."

"Enough. Begin firing, Oswald."

"As you wish."

After a deep bow, Oswald signalled the messenger who was on standby at the side.

The young messenger ran over and saluted.

Oswald saluted back.

"Pass down the order to begin firing at Belgaria's Seventh Imperial Army. When the ammunitions are used up, the frontline is to split to the left and right, and retreat to the rear. At the same time, those in the second line of defense is to replace them. That is all."

Normally, shooting to the point when the ammunitions were all used up was impossible as the enemy would have engaged them in hand-to-hand combat before that .

However, they were still trained to perform such a maneuver in the event that the ammunitions were all used up. Perhaps this time, the training would be useful as they had to begin shooting at the enemy who was at over twice the predetermined distance.

The young messenger was shocked.

As to confirm the order, he repeated Oswald's order and ended with "I will deliver the orders as above!"

The generals in the headquarters were shaken and began whispering among themselves—— However, none of them opposed Oswald's decision.

They were just pawns after all.

From among this group, the young messenger asked.

"That…… Are we really going to pass down the order to fire? Isn't the enemy still far away?"

"Ah, for a messenger to doubt me, who is abiding to the will of the esteemed queen Margaret? What is your name and the place you're from?"

"Arh?! I-I'm… Lance Corporal William Mallory. I'm from Queens Thames."

Queen Thames was one of the districts in the capital, Queens Tower. He who hailed from this place should be a born and bred citizen of High Britannia. He looked about eighteen years of age.

Oswald looked at Margaret for confirmation.

She looked his way happily.

The order to fire, and even things like war was just a way for her to kill time. Even when a mere messenger doubted her order, it was just like seasoning for her.

She got bored easily and loved making people around her perplexed.

Oswald pointed in the direction of the enemy.

"There's no need to worry. This order is the right decision and will bring us victory. . Go and fulfill your role."

"Understood!"

The young messenger, William, quickly ran off.

After a while, the riflemen began shooting.

Although the distance was within 500yd (457m), it was further than the predetermined 200yd (182m).

*It is about time to prepare for movement.*

Oswald climbed and sat on the carriage, sitting to the left of Margaret due to the sword hanging on the left side of his waist.

As it was a two-seater carriage, one of them had to direct the horse.

With a happy smile, Margaret snuggled over, hugged Oswald's right arm and pulled it towards her chest,

Thanks to that, Oswald could only used his left hand to pull the reins.

"Pardon me, but the ride may get a little shaky. My apologies."

"Fufu…… Are you thinking that I'm quite troublesome, Oswald?"

"——Eh? Why would I find you, the precious queen Margaret, troublesome? I wonder why would you even suspect that I harbour such disrespectful thoughts?"

"That's because I keep disturbing your battle plans. You should feel angry that I messed up your plans. Just like a cat messing up the place when it was left to watch the house."

*Despite understanding that much, she still ruins the plan. She really isn't normal.*

*Losing this battle means death.*

Oswald shook his head.

"My existence is to carry out Your Majesty's noble will. If I was to make a comparison, would your fingers doubt your orders when you stretch your hand out? That's impossible."

"Hm? So you are saying that you're my fingers?"

"Yes."

"Ehehe…… Even so, Oswald, you won't even touch me, isn't that strange? Even though you're a part of my body… What could you be worrying about?"

She raised her head and looked at him.

She was close enough for him to feel her breath.

Even though Oswald was wearing the military uniform, she was only lightly dressed in a silk dress.

Her body's warmth could be felt.

The right leg with her knee bent revealed her white thigh as her red dress rolled back.

Margaret exhaled a warm breath.

Whispering at his ear.

"Hey… A lot people seems to have died."

"It seems that's the case."

"I feel a little feverish."

"I see… You're' right… However, it's not even mid May now. Exposing yourself to too much breeze would damage your health. For the nation's peace and prosperity, please take care of your body."

Oswald took a silk lap blanket from the compartment near the passenger seat. The silk lap blanket was white with two red strips, which was literally the High Britannia's flag.

Once it covered her knee, Margaret puff her cheeks in protest.

“Puu——”

“Ahh, how fitting. Then, shall we welcome the Belgaria Army?”

“Hpmh… Is there even anything interesting to see?”

Oswald grinned.

*I see, so she is also a little excited, that’s a little surprising.*

“Please enjoy —— The battlefield will no longer be the era of spears and swords. This is the coming of a new war. The old would be destroyed…… Just like how Belgaria’s armies will be destroyed.”

“Hey, Oswald.”

“Pray tell me your gospel.”

“Fufufu…… You, never once issued the important commands when I am present.”

“… Is that so…… That’s would be unforgivable… I am merely leaving the finer details it to Lieutenant Glenda Graham. That’s all.”

“Okay.”

Margaret stretch her hand out and gently touched Oswald’s lips.

The Seventh Imperial Army’s fighting spirit had reached its peak.

War Advisor Vicente was riding a horse while the infantry followed closely behind.

He was wearing a light silver armour and held a jet-black sword.

Beside him was general Barguesonne who was riding his black horse calmly, making it hard to imagine that he was old.

Even though Barguesonne was a noble, he did not like to waste things. Things that could be used would be used, things that could not be used would be sent for repairs. Even for things that could not be repaired, he would find ways to use it. This was one of his virtue.

That went the same for the Armure de Plaque he was currently using. Even though this was made thirty-five years ago as his first ornament, it had already become a relic. However, Barguesonne continued using and repairing it.

If it was a normal knight, they would pass down the Armure de Plaque as a family heirloom as it was ridiculously expensive. However, for a house head that had the title of a duke , a new one would be made instead.

Ten years ago——

The emperor Liam XV at that time was more zealous in handling national affairs. He even inspected the Seventh Imperial Army in a parade..

A parade was for the army to march around the main road of the city they were garrisoned at. Not only did the emperor inspect them, even nobles and civilians gathered to watch. Normally, they should be wearing beautiful costumes.

Moreover, it was obvious that he had to wear a masterpiece for someone having the ‘general’ title.

Exactly for that, merchants advertised their newly-styled armour.

“Can a beautiful armour protect the nation?”

Barguesonne then chased them out.

If the commander was wearing a plain old armour, the subordinates would not dress themselves up either. Most of the knights only polished their iron armour before participating in the parade.

Seeing the inelegant parade, nobles who gathered at the capital sneered at them. They even commented that ‘beauty is also part of prestige’.

As the captain of Emperor Liam XV’s guard was asked, he replied.

“Even though I had seen many parades, this is my first time seeing battle-hardened soldiers.”

Hearing his answer, the people around them began speculating, thinking that ‘he answered that way due to pressure’ or ‘it’s a sarcastic comment’ and such.

No matter what, Barguesonne’s belief did not change.

He had the simple idea that adhering to traditions and respecting bloodlines was the best course. He himself would not change, thus the empire would last forever too.

That was the same as to why the young Vicente was made the war advisor, simply because he was the son of the previous war advisor who had served for a long time. Even though the previous war advisor’s opponents were the small nations in the east, he was a strategist who did not lose even a single battle.

Even Vicente himself wished to follow his father’s footstep of not losing.

Now was the time for him to show his results of what he had learned for the last three years.

This battle against High Britannia was a good opportunity for him to let his name echo throughout the empire instead of just the east.

Vicente had the confidence, and even the soldiers from the Seventh Imperial Army believed that they would win.

Scouts came running back.

“Reporting! The vanguard had already broke through 7Ar (500m)!”

“Hm.”

Barguesonne nodded his head.

Vicente felt that his plan was going smoothly.

“No matter how new their cannons are, they would eventually be reduced.”

“That’s for sure.”

At that time, what rang was not the blasting sound of the cannons, but something weaker.

——Guns are being fired?!

Vicente was shocked to the point as if his heart was gripped by someone.

He stared at the direction of the enemy intensely.

White smoke was coming out from the guns of the High Britannia’s frontline musketeers.

“Impossible! We are already within their range?!”

“I never heard that the new gun could even shoot this far……”

Barguesonne narrowed his eyes.

This was something outside his expectation.

If that was the case, once the soldiers at the front were to be injured, one could expect that the range was several times further than what they expected.

Before this, the worst scenario they expected was about five thousand casualties. Now, the casualties could even reach twice what they predicted.

Even so, they would lose without doubt if they retreat now.

Vicente who underestimated the enemy and made the plan based on simple assumptions held heavy responsibility.

He felt something crushing his stomach, making him even want to vomit.

His throat was parched and could even feel something sour in his mouth.

His back was drenched in cold sweat.

“… What is the casualty rate?”

“Someone go and take a look!”

A knight responded to Barguesonne’s command and volunteered. He then quickly mounted a horse and rode to the front.

The gunshots continued.

How many casualties did they sustain?

The knight had returned.

He had a calm expression.

“Casualties are light! Nothing to worry about!”

In the headquarter where the senior officers gathered, the atmosphere began to lighten.

Most likely, Vicente was the one who was the most relieved.

He was cheering and cursing in his heart at the same time.

—— *Trying to scare us?! The High Britannians are idiots! Idiots!*

“Hehe…… Looks like they couldn’t handle our army’s pressure and made a wrong judgement. Perhaps they wanted to show us that they do not even know the basics.”

“So, it’s too far. This is unexpectedly disappointing.”

Barguesonne seemed unhappy over the enemy commander’s blunder. Rather than feeling relieved, he looked disappointed.

“Ara, are you looking forward to the clash where both side will use all their strength, general?”

“It’s nothing to be proud of winning against the enemy who are like new recruits.”

"It can't be helped since the High Britannia Army is a place where fresh recruits gathers. The corpse of their comrades lying side by side would be proof that they protected their nation."

“Even though I hoped they were opponents that had some capability.”

Compared to the enemy who obviously became complacent and failed, the commander who wished for a strong opponent made those in the headquarter burst into laughter.

Even though they were still a little uneasy due to the huge damage caused by the new cannons, there were no other thoughts than victory in their mind.

Vicente who was nervous began to stroke his chest gently.

“Seeing the situation, it’s as we planned.”

“Hm, we do not need to respond to the enemy’s mistake. I do not want any fools in our army to attack while panicking.”

“Understood.”

“Hearing Barguesonne’s words, Vicente called a messenger over.

“Pass down my orders! Before receiving another command, they are to maintain speed. Independent actions are strictly prohibited!”

“Understood!”

The messenger quick ran away after saluting by putting his right fist to his chest.

The gunshots continued.

Even though there would still be casualties as they closed the gap, it would not load the cartridge into the rifle due to the heat from firing, which would also slightly distort the barrel.

——Is victory at hand?

Barguesonne’s hand that was holding the reins tightened its grip.

Soon, the distance between the two armies was just 4Ar (286m).

From nineteen thousand, the Belgaria's Seventh Imperial Army was left with fifteen thousand.

While High Britannia Army of ten thousand remain unscathed.

Even so, many imperial soldiers believed that they would be the winners.

Barguesonne raised one of his hand.

"Charge."

Trumpeters began playing the tune for charging.

As if it was trying to pierce the sky, it was loud enough to lose against the blasting sound of cannons and people thought it was a roar by some beasts.

The assault unit caused the ground to tremor, even Barguesonne who was on a horse could feel it.

Forward! Forward! The imperial officers shouted.

Like ferocious beasts who were released from their cage and were searching their preys, soldiers who were equipped with spears charged towards the enemy.

With some delay, the second and the third line of soldiers began to run too.

The heavy infantry who were guarding the headquarter also began sprinting.

Barguesonne and Vicente who was beside him kept their whips.

The death rate among assault units were high.

Hence, most of the soldiers here were farmers who could not pay their taxes or criminals.

Ducasse, who was thirty years old this year had his corps destroyed by bugs and was conscripted in place of the taxes he failed to pay.

It just so happened that the year when he could not pay taxes, a large-scale battle broke out. He was just that unlucky.

Even though the Empire boasted a strong military, it was only due to their high population which in turn meant more trained regular soldiers. People still died if stabbed by a spear or shot with a gun.

After the assault began, the man beside him fell immediately. During training, the fallen soldier was someone who gave him a good impression as he shared the salt he brought from his hometown with Ducasse. He died from a shot to the throat.

Even the voice of the platoon captain who gave him fruits when he was sick had disappeared.

Everyone was dying.

He remembered the face of his wife who was pregnant with his fourth child. He promised to safely returned before parting. That goes for his parents and his children too.

Ducasse ran while shouting as to suppress his fear.

“AHHHHHHH——-!!”

His metal spear and chain armour were heavy.

However, he would be killed if he stop moving here. The distance was slowly covered. Every step closer made the enemy more likely to fatally shoot him.

If he was slow, he would be shot.

He could not help but to kill the enemy before they shot. Otherwise, he would die.

His breathing almost stopped.

The signal to attack that he awaited anxiously…… He began doubting if it was a little too early as there was still some distance to cover.

Soldiers who were beside him had already ran to the front.

Am I slow? Ducasse began to panic.

Soldiers who were slow were a hindrance and would be stabbed at the back by the soldiers behind.

*I don’t want to die.*

His legs began to tremble.

If he fell down, he would be trampled by those behind. It would be an unhonourable and sorrowful death.

He was worried that the soldiers behind would misunderstand and stab him. *Don’t be mistaken, I can still run* —— Ducasse thought.

If it was now, it was the same as stumbling over a rock.

*I can still run. Can run even faster.*

He could see the enemy’s figures and they were shouting something while firing.

White smoke came out of their guns.

*Bullets*?

*Did not hit.*

*Those idiots, where were they aiming?!*

If this was just like training, the steps that followed would take a long time. The enemy would turn the gun vertical, pour gunpowder in, place the bullet in, push a ramrod down the muzzle to compress the contents. They also needed to pour gunpowder into the priming pan that would be that would be ignited by a flint during the shot…

But that was not the case for the High Britannia’s musketeers. With no regards for the hot barrel, they opened the breechblock and insert the ammunitions they had in their pockets in. In no time, they began to aim again.

——*Those bastard, what kind of joke is that?!*

*For that to be so simple!*

*Those cowards! Cowards!*

Gunshots rang out again.

Ducasse's left ear was burning.

*Got shot?! I got shot?!*

Something warm dripped down to the left side of his neck.

The sound…… The left side of his ear seemed to have heard sounds that was similar to that of a waterfall.

*What happened?*

*Don't, don't stop!*

He seemed hear someone shout.

His legs began to move.

If he stopped, he would be trampled to death by his comrades.

*I still want to return!*

He seemed to hear another voice.

That's right, the pain from earlier. You have to return the pain to them! Kill those enemy who killed your friends!

He had already reached a distance where he could clearly see the colour of the enemy soldiers' eyes.

Suddenly, he realised that those comrades who were faster than him had disappeared.

*Where could they be? No, it isn't the time to be thinking about that.*

The enemy was right in front of him.

One of the High Britannia's musketeers was a youth with golden hair and had blue eyes——*That guy, he is the enemy who I have to kill!*

Another shot was fired.

It was off course.

His hand was trembling.

The lid was open and the bullet —— had fallen to the ground.

Ducasse thrust his spear.

The golden-haired youth let out a scream that could even broke his throat.

The youth died just like this.

“Ahhhh, dieee——!!”

The spear stabbed through the youth’s body.

Ducasse stabbed the youth through his abdomen.

It felt softer than wood, just like that of straw.

There were some hardness among the softness.

*Did it reach the bone?*

The area he stabbed was below the ribs but above the stomach.

“Argh..”

The youth who had widened his eyes began to cough out blood.

Ducasse pulled his spear back.

The spear was more important any things, he could not fight other enemies without it.

Once the spear was drawn out, the abdomen began to spurt out blood.

The blood continuously dripped down.

“Mama……”

After saying his last speech which was filled with blood, the youth stopped moving.

Ducasse’s left ear was throbbing with pain as he continued hearing sounds that was similar to that of a sandstorm.

*It’s because this bastard fired…… No, is it really him? Whatever the case, I have to move on.*

Behind the High Britannia’s musketeers were the shieldbearers.

Ducasse used his momentum to stab his spears towards those large shields.

*Clanck.” Only that sound was produced as the spear did not pierce through.

*There’s not enough strength behind the thrust?!*

After that, the enemy soldiers began retreating.

*Trying to escape?!*

If they escaped here, he would have to undergo the ‘Marché de la mort’ again.

The trumpets that conveyed Belgaria’s battle orders sounded once more and the tune was that of assault. If the enemy was to retreat, push forward!

“Haaa——!!”

“They are just like beasts!”

Curses came behind the back of High Britannia's shieldbearers.

"I'll kill you! Stop running!"

He thrust his spear once more.

Those large shields were obstacles.

There were more gunshots.

It seemed that it was fired behind the shieldbearers and his comrades were hit.

The enemy slowly retreated.

Normally, stabbing the enemy at the back was as relaxing as hunting…… However, those large durable shields and the occasionally gunshots that was aimed at them prevented the formation from collapsing.

"Damn! Damn it! Die! Stop running, cowards!"

"Retreat! Quicken the pace and retreat!"

Ducasse crossed over boldly.

*Who would want to experience the 'Death March' again?! My family is waiting for me to return. Farm work is more suitable for someone like me!*

"Hyaaa——!!"

With his body in the air, he thrust his spear at the shieldbearers, creating a gap in their defense. Without any pause, he continued attacking.

The spearhead that went past the shield and pierced into the chest of the enemy who was hiding behind the shield.

"Ka?!"

That attack stirred the enemy.

"Got stabbed!"

"Retreat! Retreat!"

"Close the gap! Do not panic!"

Seeing that it was a good chance, Belgaria soldiers stepped over the corpse of the enemy as they threw away their spear and drew their swords.

As the shieldbearers could not move agilely due to the large shields, they could be easily dealt with by attacking from the side.

However, before one of the soldier who drew his sword could strike, gunshots behind the shieldbearers turned him into a beehive.

The gap that Ducasse created was closed by the other bearers

The pace in which they retreat did not change.

It repeated once more.

For some unknown reasons, Ducasse laughed.

“Aha! I’ll continue kill you all, cowards! It’s the same as before!”

He gripped his spear tightly and used his body to ram the shields. If he attacks from the front, the bullets would not come flying at him through the gaps.

The spearhead once again pass through the shields and he extended his reach.

*It’s the third one!*

“Haaa!”

*I can do it. Let it collapse here.*

At this moment, a sorrowful voice was heard, it was in Belgaria’s language.

“We’re surrounded!”

*What is he saying? I don’t understand…*

*The enemy is right in front of us.*

*It’s the same now, the shieldbearers are right in front of us.*

*Surrounded? By who?*

Gunshots could be heard from all sides.

* * *

“Oswald, we’re always escaping. Are we going to lose?~”

“Oh noble queen Margaret, please be careful not to bite your tongue. We are about to stop moving soon.”

“Ara, we don’t need to run anymore?”

Margaret used a handkerchief to wipe off the dust.

Just like before, Oswald’s right arm was being hugged in front of her chest.

“We aren’t escaping. This is a planned maneuver. Retreating while withstanding Belgaria’s assault units’ attack is the role of the shieldbearers. The unit behind the shieldbearers are to split into two and flank the enemy from the left and right.”

The High Britannia Army had formed a ‘U’ shape as they surround the Belgaria Army.

Margaret tilted her head.

“If the pie crust is too thin, it would break while wrapping, Oswald.”

Despite doing foolish things, this young girl actually understood war.

The girl was blessed by God as she was not only clever but also shrewd, which was why she got sick of the world. Perhaps to her, understanding this was natural to her.

Oswald nodded.

“Indeed, that’s the case when the opponent is the strong Belgaria Army…… Furthermore, we are surrounding them when they have more numbers than us…… Generally, this is a bad strategy. However, that only applies in the era of fighting with swords and shields. Our army are equipped with top quality rifles. While shields can be used to block those spears, what about bullets? That’s impossible…… In addition, they have to reorganise to deal with enemy on their flanks. Only those at the outer edge of the formation could fight if they use spears, can they change the formation of the soldiers on the inside? What would they do when bullets came flying at them?”

“Ufufu…… I can’t help wanting to laugh when I imagine you pondering about these.

“As I’m not considerate enough, I’m ashamed to have worried the gentle queen Margaret. I can only pray that this battle isn’t a futile academic exercise.”

“You seems pretty confident.”

“As it is for the sake of the radiant queen Margaret, I had put in all of my effort.”

Oswald did not simply rely on theory.

The effectiveness of the tactics by combining the shields and new guns had already been experimented with and confirmed in High Britannia’s civil war.

He provoked the people at borders to rebel and sent in the riflemen in the name of suppression.

Experimenting it on the citizens of High Britannia would be too bloody, so he didn’t allow Margaret to learn about this…

It could not be help. Unlike weapons, exposing one’s strategy early would cause the value of the tactic to drop, which was why he could not experiment outside the country.

This time, the living shieldbearers or rather, their corpse was used as cover. As long as it could hinder the enemy from approaching, anything would be used.

As the fight continued, even the imperial soldiers’ bodies would be used as cover.

Margaret whispered into Oswald’s ear.

“You can’t do that, Oswald…… To actually kill my subjects for the sake of experimenting.”

“How…… That is……”

“I can’t forgive you for monopolizing something so interesting.”

Oswald’s ear was bitten by Margaret.

And the bite was filled with strength.

It was enough to tear his ear off.

“A-are you referring to the rebellions that were put down…? That… My apologies for reporting those incidents late. There won’t be a next time, I’ll pay attention——?!”

This time, Margaret licked the ear.

The wounded area was licked, soothing the pain. A slick sticky noise entered his ears.

“Ara…… Blood is oozing out……

“If it’s for the sacred you, Queen Margaret, I am even willing to offer my organs to you. There’s nothing happier for me than serving you.”

“Hey, Oswald.”

“Pray tell me your wishes.”

“Exactly how many people had we killed?”

“Four thousand before Belgaria Army charged at us. Two thousand after they began charging…… After surrounding them, about another three thousand.”

“It seems more than that.”

“Pardon me. For our side, we lost about two thousand.”

“Ara, that’s rather little.”

Margaret said it unhappily.

Even Oswald was troubled whether to apologise or not.

As to reduce the numbers in Belgaria Army, High Britannia’s musketeers were positioned at the front was used as bait.

There was about a thousand casualties over there.

Ever since the shieldbearers and musketeers began retreating and that after the musketeers had fired, the casualties should be three times of it.

That was because for every enemy infantry, a shieldbearer and a musketeer would cooperate and resist. Hence it was obvious that they succeed. Furthermore, the shields could protect against spears and bullets could even pierce through the thick part of plate armour at a close distance.

In reality, High Britannia was in a more advantageous situation.

Even if the shieldbearers collapsed and the musketeers were defeated, there would be reserves to replace them from the back.

Especially the flanks, ever since they started engaging the enemy, numerous soldiers were dispatched there.

Furthermore, the cannons were repositioned and began firing once more. As the Belgaria Army had maintained their tight formation, the cannons produced great results.

The number of survivors was about ten thousand for Belgaria and eight thousand for High Britannia…

Oswald expressed admiration for the enemy in his heart.

Even when they were in a disadvantageous position, they could still fight with discipline.

In his experiment, once the forefront assault team collapsed, the rebels realised the terror of the musketeers and began to stumble and escaped.

Belgaria Army should had realised their defeat. Even so, they still did not give up.

What a noble spirit they have.

How disciplined their soldiers were.

Oswald slowly got intoxicated. Just like throwing a masterpiece that much time and passion was invested in onto the ground with his two hands.

* * *

Vicente was struggling painfully against the disadvantage.

As his role was to design a battle plan, his actual role in battle was just a consultant to the commander.

When something unexpected happened, he would be considered a second-rate strategist. Furthermore, if the army was to be defeated in this situation, he would not be able to escape punishment even if he survived.

Barguesonne growled.

“Do not cower! Let them see the might of the Empire Army!”

“Oh——!!”

Even though his voice was filled with strength, it was not that effective as it was blocked by the shields.

In contrast, bullets were flying at them. As it was shot from three direction, it would certainly kill someone even if the soldiers at the front was not hit by it.

The enemy’s attack was sure-hit but on Belgaria’s side, they could only kill one enemy after a few attacks and with much difficulties.

Vicente’s lip was trembling

“Impossible…… Isn’t Belgaria’s armies the strongest in open field battles?”

Before the battle, no, up till the point, the assault units were about to mow down the enemy like weed, it was a bright future to him. He believed that he would bathe in glory and praises.

Now, he could only see the soldiers dying and hear their sorrowful cries of despair.

The bright future was slowly engulfed by the darkness.

“How…… Impossible……”

Even if they would be a little slow in reaction when fighting in oceans or forests, Belgaria’s infantry was undefeated in open field battles. It was supposed to be their advantage.

Even up till now, they had been winning in the eastern border.

Even though they loved to boast.

“Even though… I trusted the plan for a direct clash…”

“Vicente! Stop dazing around!”

The only thing that he couldn’t accept was disappointing the old lieutenant general. Barguesonne felt like a second father to him.

Vicente yelled: “I-if we can approach the enemy, the cannons and guns would not matter! They would feel the empire’s might! That’s what the battalion captains said, which was why I!”

“What are you still saying?!”

“Which is why, I! I’m not wrong, Lieutenant General Barguesonne?! They are the one who are wrong!”

“……”

Barguesonne showed a lonely expression.

Vicente shouted once more.

“That’s right! T-that border regiment’s Regis Auric! Because of that guy, his words had affected the morale of our troop! Or could it be that he was jealous of my success, he even colluded with the enemy. That’s right! That’s how this situation came to be!”

“Enough.”

“So you understand, Lieutenant General Barguesonne?!”

“I have to properly correct your character!”

Vicente felt the pressure as if Barguesonne was announcing his execution.

He felt that the general would used the spear in his hand to stab him.

“Ah?!”

“Hence…… you can’t die here.”

“Ah… uh…?”

“I gathered people with pure bloodline as my staff and discussed the strategy repeatedly in earnest and finalized this battle plan. The result of this was my lost as the commanding officer. Someone like you want to shoulder this responsibility? Don’t overestimate yourself!”

“Lieutenant General Barguesonne……”

After finishing his words, Barguesonne turned to his back.

He shouted at the soldiers once more.

“Do not be bothered by those at the sides! We shall cut the enemy into break through the enemy and cut them into halves! Show them the pride and spirit of the Seventh Imperial Army! All men, forward! For the Empire!”

“Ohhh——!!”

The command which made the best out of the mistakes ignited the fighting spirit of the dejected soldiers.

If this go on, they would be wiped out.

That being the case, he thought that it would be better that they died as heroes for their country and thus they roared.

The farmers and criminals who were stationed at the front had all fell while the regulars had already engaged the enemy with more aggression.

Barguesonne yelled.

“Charge! Attack! Forward! March on! Bring the enemy down and stomp them! Step over your comrades who had fallen! All men, forward!”

Barguesonne was shouting commands while moving forward himself.

He had already left the protection of his bodyguards.

The aides who were left behind and the guards who were passed by move forward in a panic after snapping out of their daze.

The surrounding soldiers also pushed forward.

“The general is at the front!”

“Lieutenant General is attacking!”

“We have to follow him!”

“Forward! March on! There is no one else other than us, the Seventh Imperial Army, to protect our nation! How can we just die here! Defeat the enemy!!”

The assault units at the front had closed the gap between them and the shieldbearers and thrust their spear into the gap between the shieldbearers.

For every spear that was thrust, there was a gunshot in response.

It was a headshot—— However, another soldier from the back squeeze through the gap where the fallen soldier was and continued attacking.

Some soldiers threw away their spears and used their hands to grab the enemy’s shields. Even when his abdomen was shot, he did not feel any pain as he was in a frenzy.

The shieldbearer who was lifted up in the air let go of his shield in fear. The shieldbearer without his shield and the musketeers behind him were assaulted by spears.

The enemy collapsed due to pressure.

The decreasing Belgaria Army had suffered much losses up till this point had cause the enemy’s formation to collapse and not just the frontline.

Someone shouted in the language of High Britannia.

“Retreat! Retreat!”

*We can do it!* Having that mindset, their fatigue disappeared and their concentration increased.

The Belgaria Army's momentum had reached their highest point.

Barguesonne was about to charge to the forefront and shouted.

"All men, forward! Quicken your pace! We're almost there! Attack! All Men——?!"

Suddenly, he felt a burning sensation at his right chest.

A bullet had pierced through his armour.

He could not breath.

His lung was punctured. Even if he tried using his mouth to breath, he could only feel the blood being sucked into his lung and could not breath. This was a painful death akin to drowning.

Barguesonne had defeated many of his enemies…… He realised that it was finally his turn.

The first thing he did was to use his knee and squeezed the horse's abdomen tightly. Then, he used his elbow and ribs to secure his spear in the forward position. What he grabbed onto was not the reins but the horse mane as he straighten his back.

Both his lungs and mouth was filled with blood, Barguesonne could not speak anymore.

His lips shut tightly while he widened his eyes.

His consciousness was slowly fading away.

He entrusted his will of moving forward to his horse—— Barguesonne died on his horse just like this.

* * *

A messenger ran to carriage where Oswald and Margaret were.

"The enemy is about to reach us!"

"Is that so."

"The frontline could not hold any longer!"

The High Britannia Army had became a '凹' shape while Belgaria Army continued maintaining the square formation as they attempted to break through the front while ignoring the sides.

It seemed that the Belgaria Army realised that being surrounded on three sides meant death to them, so they attempted to break through the front.

"Ara ara, how terrible. They would escape if this go on."

Margaret said even though she didn't seem to thought that at all. Even someone would put in more sincerity when keeping their clothes from getting wet from the rain.

Oswald shrugged.

"That is so. If that's the case, isn't letting them go a gentlemanly act?"

"Looks like you had considered this too."

“Of course. There’s an old saying that ‘letting the trapped enemy off’. After all, a trapped enemy would fight to their last breathe in an attempt to escape. Furthermore, while the Belgaria Army is proficient in attacking, they aren’t good in retreating. If I stretched the sides and thin out the front, they would definitely break through the front.”

The unit at the front opening up like a hole at the bottom of a pocket.

The Belgaria Army who thought they had succeeded in assaulting began cheering while marching on.

Oswald had a wry smile.

“In war, I feel that we can’t be that whimsical… “

“Won’t that be uninteresting?”

“I pray that it would not be the case.”

Just like before the battle, the musketeers who were shooting at the sides began to gathered once more.

The headquarter was slowly moved.

Soon, they had positioned themselves behind the enemy.

It was all going as planned.

The opponent had been fatigue after breaking the encirclement. At the same time, their response had slowed due to the spears and armours. All the High Britannia’s musketeers had to do was to shoot at the escaping enemy.

Margaret yawned and said.

“It should be their pride for not retreating. I take my hat off them for having something more important than their lives.”

“That’s true for a soldier.”

It was as she said, the Belgaria Army should had withdrawn. Even if they would lose, they would not be receiving as much damage as now.

Thanks to the forced assault, it became a situation where the musketeers could shoot at the enemy’s back.

Perhaps the enemy did not comprehend the whole situation. It was possible that they thought High Brittania’s headquarters was at the center when they charged.

However, Oswald had moved the headquarter to the left wing long ago.

The front where the enemy could easily focused on was like a bait. It was originally planned to be penetrated.

Oswald gave an order to the messenger who was moving along with the carriage.

“There’s no reason to prolong the battle. Decimate the enemy in one go. The musketeers are to move forward and pursue them.”

“Understood!”

At this moment——

Another messenger came running and reported.

“There’s an ambush! The enemy had attacked us! From the flank, ah, no. it’s the back now! Five hundred cavalry!”

“What?!”

“Ah, it’s the Empire’s… Black Knights!!”

“Ah?!”

Oswald leaned his body out.

If not for Margaret holding his right arm, he would have jumped down the carriage.

He took a deep breathe as to calm his emotion.

“Huu…… If it’s this amount, it’s nothing. Then, we just need to order the fourth battalion in the left wing to intercept——”

Wa! Cries of anger and sorrow from their back had overlapped.

——*We’re already under attack?!*

*Do you know how wide my surveillance net is?! This is too fast!”*

“Why……?!”

“Ahaha!”

After seeing Oswald’s expression, Margaret laughed.

In an instant, she used her hand to cover her mouth.

Oswald actually let out a awkward sound and expression in front of her.

The clopping of the horses had become louder.

Oswald suppressed his feeling and squeeze out an order.

“Pass the emergency rescue order to Glenda’s unit…… Before that, the bodyguards in the headquarter are to protect Her Majesty at all cost.”

Tactfully removing Margaret’s hand, Oswald’s right arm was finally freed.

He quickly jumped down the carriage.

“Your Majesty…… It would be a little noisy… So please wait a moment here.”

“What a shame, Oswald. You had a manly look now. What should I do. I wonder how you should compensate me for this.”

“Ke…… My apologies for showing you my brash side.”

He had to show such an expression even if he had to force it out.

Margaret lied down on the carriage.

“That’s right, your unsmiling face is really ugly. For a rabbit who is more suited for hiding in its cove trying to imitate a lion sure is funny.”

“For me to hear such praises from the sacred queen Margaret, I’m honoured.”

He had a gentle smile.

After Oswald gently saluted, he walked in the opposite direction of the carriage was facing.

The bodyguards in the headquarter had already engaged the cavalry.

# Chapter 5: Battle of Lafressange

“In a nutshell, it was due to arrogance.”

When asked for the cause of this dire situation, Regis replied so.

Altina nodded.

“If they had planned a little more carefully, the outcome would be different, right?”

“At the very least, they wouldn’t have had the mindset that they had already won… It’s regrettable, but this is a case of overconfidence. Even I did not expect the situation to be this bad…… Against an enemy with unknown weapons, they did not consider that the enemy might employ other methods of fighting? Our side has the numerical superiority while High Britannia Army’s supply line is stretched thin. Shouldn’t a frontal assault be our last resort?”

Regis, who was riding Karakara, shook his head.

The Beilschmidt Border Regiment entered the battlefield from behind the Seventh Imperial Army as if it was chasing them.

Soon, they were halfway down the mountain and saw the U shape formation of the enemy.

From the neat movement, it was obvious that it was not the frontline collapsing but a planned maneuver.

That went the same for the Seventh Imperial Army breaking through from the front. Rather than saying they had cut a path through, it was more like the enemy opening a path for them.

Now, the U shape formation had become a double column formation. The Belgaria’s soldiers that were in between them were being shot far more easily than a fox.

After which——

It was not hard to imagine the Seventh Imperial Army being attacked from behind.

It was a complete defeat.

Altina who was riding behind Regis asked.

“Regis, are you regretting it?”

“…… Yes. Just like I mentioned, we should have moved north and linked up with the First Imperial Army. If things went well, we could do a pincer attack on the southern enemy.”

Even if the enemy was using the latest guns, the result would be different if they could attack them from both sides.

Against the enemy of ten thousand, the Belgaria Army could muster fifty thousand to attack. The Seventh Imperial Army mainly consisted of infantry, but there were three thousand cavalry from the First Imperial Army.

——No, out of the three thousand cavalry of First Imperial Army, one cohort was burnt down.

The First Imperial Army had two thousand five hundred cavalry now.

Even so, by adding five hundred black knights of Beilschmidt Border Regiment, there would be a total of three thousand cavalry.

If they could do a detour and attack from behind, the casualties at the frontal assault would be reduced greatly.

This proposal was brought up in the war council, but was rejected without any consideration.

"… If I was more convincing, the result would have been different, right…?"

"Even if you regret it, nothing can be changed now."

"No, but……"

"Rather than dwelling in the past, we should focus on what is in front of us! There's still some things that we can do, right?!"

"…… Yes."

Regis already knew where the enemy's headquarter was as he saw a black coloured two-wheeled carriage, which was eye-catching. It should be used by someone of importance and coupled with the reports, it should be High Britannia's new queen, Margaret Steelart.

High Britannia's commander—— Colonel Oswald Coulthard understood the strength of Belgaria's infantry without a doubt. He should know that the infantry was strong in charging, but not used to changing its course of attack.

If that was the case, he would not place the headquarter at the dangerous frontal area. When the enemy was changing into U shape, the headquarter should have already relocated to one of its wing.

After observing the situation——

It was as expected, the enemy headquarter had relocated to the left wing.

"…… A good chance."

"What should we do now, Regis?!"

"It's about time we start moving too."

Regis raised his hand to attract Jerome's attention.

"Pardon me!"

"Is it time?! It's finally here!"

"Ah, that's right."

"Che…… You should speak with more dignity!"

"I-is that so……"

Altina spoke from behind.

“Really! It’s fine as it is! Tell us quickly, Regis!”

“That…… The black knights would attack the enemy’s left wing. The black coloured carriage would be where the enemy’s headquarter is.”

“Got it, so we will be attacking the flank of the left wing, right!”

“No…… Most likely, the enemy’s back is facing us. As our cavalry speed is faster than that of the messenger, it would take some for him to report. As such, we have to make use of this time to launch a surprise attack and prevent the enemy from reorienting themselves.”

The weakness of changing formations and relocating the headquarter was that it was hard to maintain the enemy surveillance network.

The soldiers moving into their new position was a hindrance to the messenger.

Especially when they were in the midst of changing formation. The question of where to go and how to reach the headquarter was constantly changing.

Precisely because of that, Regis wanted to be stationed at high grounds as to observe the whole battlefield while the High Britannia Army was stationed at low lands.

Jerome tilted his head.

“The back facing us? Another magical talk of yours.”

“N-no, that’s not it…… I just happens to know it. It’s because I read it before……”

“Ahhh…… Forget it. Even if the riflemen are lined against us, I’ll just trample over them!”

“After that, the direction to go after breaking through isn’t the front of the enemy, but to the left side.”

“Eh? Hmph, I see…… Leave it to me!”

Jerome grabbed his spear. And picked up his pace.

“Black Knights, Follow me! We’re going to trample over them!”

“Ohh——!!”

The cavalry clad in all black charged towards the enemy.

The clopping sound grew louder.

If they were changing their formation quietly, they would have realised that the enemy coming from the back was a group of cavalry and thus changed their formation.

However, when thousands of soldiers equipped with metal armour were moving, it was not easy for them to notice the cavalry charging at them.

Even if they could, turning to defend against them was even more difficult.

Regis also told Altina the plan.

“Have the infantry march forward at full speed.

“Is it really fine? There’s still 10Ar (715m) between us, won’t they be tired?”

“Because we won’t be fighting the enemy, so I don’t think we need to move that fast. The enemy headquarters will move to the right to defend against the black knights assault, and we will fire arrows in that direction.”

“Eh? How do you even know this?!”

“Isn’t this common… ? To protect the headquarter from the cavalry’s attack, one should move out of the way of the enemy’s charge?”

“That’s right, it’s pointless to escape in the cavalry’s direction. But, can someone really know how others would move?”

It was natural for Altina to be worried.

However, Regis took the initiative and said.

“The Black Knights will be veering to the left in their charge through the enemy…… It is still dangerous for them due to the guns that can take their lives in one shot.”

“Still targets aside, it is difficult to aim at a charging cavalry!”

“That is so.”

They could only pray for them to return safely.

In any case, as the Black Knights escaped from the left, the enemy headquarter should relocated to the right.

“We will be able to rain arrows onto the enemy headquarter, right?”

“…… To be exact, we just need to act like we are doing so.”

“Eh?”

“If we are too close, the counterattack would be terrifying. It will be enough just to cover the Black Knights and the Seventh Imperial Army to escape. If the enemy had to protect the headquarter with all their might, their commands to pursue will be delayed. After all, there are only so many messengers.”

“……”

Altina was speechless.

Regis was beginning to feel a little uneasy.

“…… Erm? Did I say something weird or miss out anything?”

“Normally, one would only consider your allies movement right?”

“Is that so?”

“So Regis think about what the enemy commander would do too.”

“Ahh… Yes, since it was written in the book. Rather than focusing on each individual soldiers, the book focus more on the roles of commander and aides. Things like when would it be difficult to mount a cavalry attack or how to harass the enemy as to delay their pursuit. These things are easier to remember.”

“Is it written in some military reference book?”

“No…… But in terms of stories…… For example, there are more knights and princes protagonist than ordinary soldiers right?”

“You’re referring to the person who wrote I’m the Wizard?”

“Well…… He even wrote a book titled Angels’ War. It seems that the army was composed of only girls.”

“Ha? Why are there only girls?”

“Isn’t that kind of adorable?”

“Eh…? So Regis also feel something like that.”

“Please don’t speak as if I do not have any emotions. Even I will feel something when witnessing a beautiful moment and I think cats and dogs are adorable too.”

“So you find girls cute too?”

“Well… I suppose so.”

“Is that so… To view girls the same as pets……”

“Wait……?! Are you mistaking what I said?!”

Altina chuckled. She straighten her posture, drew the sword from her waist and pointed it at the sky.

“All men, charge! Cover Sir Jerome!”

“Ohh——!!”

“Continue to march on until another command arrive! After which, we will be firing arrows at the enemy once the trumpet sounds to let them escape!”

The soldiers let out a roar.

Forward, retreat, turning, fire arrows, attacking…… The soldiers were trained to listen to those simple commands from the tune of the trumpets and to move swiftly.

Though they did not know how well they could move due to the mercenaries groups they hired.

As Altina waved her sword to the front, the trumpet for charging was sounded.

The warhorse, Karakara, quicken its pace.

Regis wondered whether the horse really understood the orders of humans. The soldiers behind maintained the pace to run 7Ar (500m).

*Looks like Altina have some capability, that’s great..*

* * *

Seeing the cavalry’s momentum, Oswald quickly gave out instructions.

“Move the headquarter to the elevated ground to the north! Make haste!”

“Understood!”

As the messenger ran, the trumpets sounded.

It was too slow.

Two soldiers were pulling the reins of the black coloured carriage, even Margaret was to be moved……

The timing was tight and he wondered if they could make it in time.

The heavy infantry guards were overrun.

“To think that we recruited soldiers that are this weak……”

Be it the shieldbearers or the riflemen, they were still alright in a situation similar to that of their training. However, once they were exposed to unexpected situations, their weakness would begin to show.

*That reminds me, it was the same when the Third Prince of Belgaria, Bastian, attacked the fort.*

What was more unforgivable than unexpectedly being attacked was that he pointed his gun at Margaret.

“Hu…… There’s no need to panic, the enemy shouldn’t be someone that hard to deal with.”

*Is this the difference caused by experience?* Oswald thought.

Without bringing any guards, he went in the direction where the battle was happening.

Oswald stopped some distance away.

In the face of the approaching cavalry, the soldier shrivelled as if they saw a nightmare approaching them.

“Excuse me, soldier. Can you pass me your rifle for a moment?”

“Ha? Er, eh?! C-commander Sir!”

“No, I’m just a staff officer.”

Oswald took a rifle from one of the soldier who was protecting the headquarter. He did not do it violently as if he was snatching it, but he also did not have the time for the soldier to present it to him.

Oswald did not have such interests.

The gears were turning a little chaotically

“They are just cavalry riding on momentum, we just need to crush the head——”

Oswald opened the lid and confirmed that the cartridge was loaded. After closing it, he aimed at the foremost rider.

As there were High Britannia’s soldiers in front, he had to shoot in the gaps between heads.

However, Oswald was taller than most soldiers and was also confident in his marksmanship. In addition, the enemy was riding a horse.

It was enough to get him a clear shot.

The target was a knight wearing black armour.

*Is the shining spear the Le Cheveu D'une Dame (Dame's hair)?*

*If that's the case, he should be the famous black knight, Jerome Jean De Beilschmidt.*

*No matter how outstanding he is, he would die when a bullet pierced through him.*

"Hu……"

Oswald pulled the trigger.

The hand that was on the right of the gun pulled the trigger, causing the hammer to hit the firing pin.

The firing pin then struck the primer that was located behind the bullets.

An explosion occurred inside, causing the bullet to shoot out from the barrel.

The rotation given to the bullet gave it a almost perfect straight line trajectory towards the head of the black knight.

At the very moment Oswald pulled the trigger, Jerome moved.

The bullet pass through thin air.

"Ah?!"

"Oryah! Those who wish to die, quickly come out now!"

The loud voice that spoke the language of Belgaria swept through the High Britannia's soldiers.

*He dodged it?*

*Intuition? Experience?*

Although his target was moving in a way that was hard to get a bead on him, Oswald anticipated those movements when he fired.

However, as if seeing through the attack, he dodged at the very moment when Oswald fired.

Even if it was a coincidence, it was as expected of a hero.

Oswald returned the rifle to the soldier. The gun could not be used again without reloading and he did not have any ammunition with him.

"Looks like he isn't a simple foe…… Shieldbearers, attention! There is no need to block the path of the Black Knights! Instead, become a wall that can fend them off from approaching the headquarter! While it's regrettable an order that was not in the training have to be made, protect our queen!"

"U-understood!"

"Pass down the command to those beside you! Wall! Become a wall which will protect the queen!"

The message was not passed down through messenger or trumpets, but through the soldiers to their neighbours. Soon, they were finally done arranging themselves.

Compared to their previous actions, this was far slower.

Even though they were trained on what to do during a frontal assault by cavalry, they could only improvise to deal with this.

An ugly wall shape line formed slowly.

*How long can this last?*

Oswald used his right hand to pull the sword out from his waist. His hand was hurting badly.

Once he put strength into it, bloodstains could be seen on the white bandage on his hand.

Half a month ago—— It was the area where he was injured by the Third Prince of Belgaria, Bastian.

The wound had already reopened from the recoil of the gun from earlier.

His mouth turned into a sneer.

"Hu…… Am I going to protect my country here?"

Just like a clock which had a missing tooth on its gear, he felt his heart was in a disarray.

The cavalry drew closer.

The shieldbearers were groaning while the riflemen were madly shooting …

Jerome was already in front of them.

For a moment, their eyes made contact.

He was just like a beast.

Oswald felt that Jerome's mouth moved for a moment.

——Fufu, so you're Oswald?

In actuality, the Black Knights ran past him as if they were riding in a deserted plains.

Just like when Jerome avoided the bullet. Even when they had received training as to shoot at the vanguard of the cavalry, the guns that were aimed at him did not bring any results.

Even if the bullets grazed him, it could not pierce through him.

*That hardness, is it the new steel?*

Even if it could only be made in High Britannia, they could not totally prevent it from being exported. There were also merchants that did not consider the consequences should they sell it to the Empire.

In fact, it would not be surprising if the Empire's nobles made their full armour with the new metal, though it would be foolish to do so.

Just like a typhoon., the Black Knights went away.

*The wall that was made in a rush seems to have some effect.*

*No, that's not right. What if their main motive wasn't to attack the headquarter but to tire us out and create confusion?*

*If that's the case, we should pursue the cavalry from the back.*

Just as Oswald was about to pass down the command, a soldier yelled.

"The enemy infantry! They have drawn their bows!"

"What did you say?!"

In the area of the dust of cloud that was made by the cavalry——

Were soldiers who had already drawn their bows.

Just before Oswald could give the order, someone shouted "Protect the queen!"

*So the slogan I used earlier to raise the soldiers' spirits had become a disturbance this time…*

The shieldbearers protected the headquarter while the riflemen began firing at the enemy.

If this was the case, it would take some time for the commander to reassert control.

Oswald covered his mouth.

"I see…… So war really isn't a place where one can be whimsical."

"Sir Oswald!"

It was Glenda who was equipped with heavy armour.

The number of weapons on her had increased further ever since she entered the battlefield.

At her back was a spear, four guns were hanging at her waist and her chestplate and shoulderguard held ammunitions.

Her bulky look made her looked like she would be slow. However, the light infantry behind her that finally caught up were all breathless .

Glenda had an apologetic look.

"My apologies for arriving late!"

"It's fine, it isn't a problem."

*Since the Black Knights was stopped from approaching the headquarter and Glenda's unit had arrived, we can prevent the army from plunging into confusion.*

*Most likely, the enemy cavalry had already retreated.*

*Should I pursue them …?*

The soldiers attention were still on the enemy that appeared behind them.

Glenda also noticed that and immediately responded: “Ah, I’ll immediately set out to engage them!”

Oswald shook his head.

“Calm down a little, Lieutenant…… The bow is unable to shoot this far. At least, not till the headquarter.”

“Ah, that’s right.”

The distance between them was about 200yd (183m)

If it was a longbow, it might be able to shoot at the outer ring, but definitely not enough to shoot at the headquarter.

Even though this was within the range of High Britannia’s rifles, it was not a distance they could fire at accurately.

“That was a plan intended to create confusion and intimidate us.”

“I-I see…”

Glenda’s face redden as she completely fell for the enemy’s trick.

“Seeing that they had already drawn their bows, it would be natural for people to believe they would shoot. After all, the regular soldiers do not have any ability in measurement and estimation.”

Which was why the riflemen only began firing once the commander orders it after receiving confirmation from a professional surveyor well-verse in measuring distance.

If the soldiers could gauge it themselves, the commanders could just issue the order to fire when the enemy was at a set distance away and be done with it.

Glenda pointed.

“The enemy is retreating!”

“Hmm, that’s because the Black Knights have escaped. Also, the Seventh Imperial Army too.”

“Ah?!”

Taking another look, Glenda realised that they could not pursue anymore as the Seventh Imperial Army had been moving away from them.

Dark clouds gloom over Glenda’s face.

“Could it be that, the cavalry and the archers were all for this?”

“He targeted us when we were changing our formation to chase the Seventh Imperial Army…… Using the Black Knights to attack…… And revealing the archers after the cavalry retreated to induce confusion……”

“The enemy has someone outstanding.”

“That’s normal. After all, the Belgaria Empire is a powerhouse in the continent.”

“Y-yes… That’s right.”

Most likely, she had forgotten how big the enemy was as she was getting carried away by the victory.

Oswald saw the flag of the retreating archer unit.

It was a green shield.

“That flag… it should be the Beilschmidt Border Regiment. Not just the Black Knights, their infantry too.”

“Where did I hear that name…?

“That should be the unit that conquered Fort Volk. As a precautionary measures, I even asked the Varden Duchy to stop them and also sent them cannons……”

*Looks like there wasn’t any effect.*

*Perhaps they didn’t even attack the fort. If that’s the case, there is a need for some punishment.*

Glenda straightened her posture.

“That means the Varden Duchy failed to stop them! What a disgrace!”

“It can’t be help. It’s because that unit is that outstanding, we even experienced it ourselves.”

“Y-yes…… Their commander seems to be a princess.”

“That’s right. You did your homework, Lieutenant. The commander of Beilschmidt Border Regiment should be the Empire’s fourth princess, Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria…… Compared to that, her strategist seems to be the capable one.”

“Ahh, so that’s it! I heard it before! His name is……”

Glenda blushed.

While her martial arts skill was outstanding and her loyalty was as solid as steel, but her intelligence was a little regrettable.

She was currently troubled like a student who encountered a difficult mathematics question.

As this appearance of her was rare to the light infantry guards, their eyes widened so much they became round.

A messenger came running towards them.

He knelt on one knee in front of Oswald.

“Sir staff officer, a royal decree from Her Majesty!

“Pray convey the orders.”

“That…… ‘*I’ve been waiting so long that I thought of dying*’, something like that…”

“Rather than saying it as an decree, it’s more like passing down a message. Understood, thanks for the hard work.”

The messenger lowered his head embarrassingly.

Oswald instructed Glenda:

“Lieutenant, I have to return to Her Majesty…… I’ll leave the sorting out of the units here to you. We are about to set off soon.

“Understood!”

Glenda saluted.

She then regrettably muttered.

“If Sir Oswald could continue commanding us… Then the Empire’s strategist would not have any chance. Why did she come to the battlefield…”

It looked like she was unhappy with the fact that Margaret was coming along.

Oswald shrugged.

“No, that’s wrong. It’s precisely because there is Her Majesty that there’s me. The battle this time ended with us defeating the Belgaria Army that was twice our number and thus opened a path to their capital, so there’s nothing to regret about. In fact, we should puff our chest out with pride and sing praise to our victory.”

“Y-yes!”

Glenda smiled happily.

That was the girl whose cheeks were dyed red. However, on the battlefield, she was known as ‘Battle demon’, so she had a unapproachable side too.

Oswald returned her salute and move towards the black carriage.

All the while remembering the enemy strategist’s name in his heart.

Empire Year 851. 19th May——

At the battle of Lafressange, High Britannia achieved overwhelming victory again, matching their record in their first battle.

Because of this defeat, the empire’s frontlines retreated greatly.

It had shown the world that guns would become the mainstay in battle.

High Britannia’s First Division began moving towards the Empire’s capital.

Even so, after the battle had ended.

They camped on some hills at a distance not too far from the battlefield. Cannons were lined and riflemen were keeping a lookout. It was not that easy to approach the capital.

* * *

The defeated Seventh Imperial Army was shocked to hear the passing of their commander.

After escaping from the enemy, they were too tired to keep a lookout as they continued to stay motionless.

* * *

Dusk——

After the supply teams arrived and make their rounds around the battlefield, they could finally treat the injured and prepare food.

Rather than saying it was the military camp, it was more like the gathering of refugees.

As the Seventh Imperial Army did not send anyone for a meeting, Regis and Altina went to the headquarter of the Seventh Imperial Army as to discuss about what they should do next.

Even Jerome was injured and had to receive treatment. Luckily, it was not anything serious.

There were casualties in the Black Knights as well. Though it was unclear, there should be near a hundred casualties.

Regis and Altina passed through the tired Seventh Imperial Soldiers…

Only the large headquarters tent was assembled.

After obtaining permission from the sentry, they entered the tent.

“Please come in…”

As the cloth that act as the door was pushed opened, Regis asked softly. The senior officers inside looked over at them.

Altina narrowed her brows as their face was as dark as corpses.

Barguesonne’s seat was empty.

The messenger that spoke foolishly was here too. He averted his gaze, but it seems he was the only one they could talk to.

Altina asked to confirm.

“Has the Lieutenant General passed on?”

“……Yes.”

He nodded.

“What about the others? Did the head battle strategist survive?”

“The head battle strategist…… Vicente…… had become like a child.”

“Ha?”

“He behaved like a child losing his parent, not knowing what to do and kept talking to Lieutenant General’s corpse…… From his behaviour, he is a gone case…”

“For that to happen…”

Altina sighed while using her hand to support her forehead.

While it was true that they had a tragic ending, but the survivors would not be able to exact vengeance for the Lieutenant General if they mull around like this.

Regis closed his eyes for a moment.

It was for the people who died…

Altina walked to the innermost of the tent and stood in front of the senior officers.

“First, my rank is Major General. Hence, I have the highest position second only to Lieutenant General Barguesonne. Is that right?”

“Y-yes……”

As the senior officers did not agree or deny, the messenger who spoke about Vicente answered her. While he was rude before the battle, it was unlikely he would be so after the battle.

Altina asked.

“Looks like you could still speak. What is your name?”

“Coignieres…… Ah, no… My name is Coignieres.”

“Understood. Before coming here, I roughly understand the unit’s situation. You guys have only two choices. Either returning to your home base in the eastern battlefront or continue fighting the High Britannia Army with a newly appointed commander. That’s all.”

Apparently, the officers did not even have any strength to argue.

They were completely silent.

Coignieres lowered his gaze.

“If we withdraw… Will we be charged for defying orders?”

“Wouldn’t it be fine? Since the commander had died, I don’t think you would be blamed. Furthermore, the only person who could investigate it, Latreille might not even have the strength to do so.”

This time, they began to become noisy.

“Exactly what is going on……?”

“A messenger came. The First Imperial Army had engaged the enemy and while they obtained victory, the commander was injured. It’s rare to see the commander getting injured after winning the battle.”

Just by considering the sorry state the Seventh Imperial Army was in, it was easy to imagine what the First Imperial Army had gone through.

At the very least, the victory they expected deviated too far from reality.

In any case, to the soldiers, it was a big thing to them that they would lose their emperor’s representative who was leading the Belgaria’s Army.

“——Will we lose this war?”

People who thought this began to increase.

Regis scratched his head.

*How many of the survivors will desert? If there are deserters in this desolate area, they would either die of diseases or become bandits.*

Thinking about the nearby villages, his head began to ache.

Altina continued her words.

“Latreille would be here tomorrow night as he intended to link up with us. If you still want to return to the rally point, I believe it’s best to do so before he comes.”

If they linked up with the First Imperial Army, the Seventh Imperial Army which lost their commander would serve under the First Imperial Army.

Even if a certain person became the commander, the most she could do was to retreat.

Coignieres lifted his head.

“W-we … lost Lieutenant General Barguesonne!”

“Yes……”

“The General died protecting the Empire!”

Altina nodded.

Regis was also quietly listening.

Coignieres continued.

“We lost something precious to us! We already gave our best for this battle! Shouldn’t it be enough?! We can’t even be called a unit now! After becoming such a state, how can we still continue battling as soldiers?! Please allow us to return to our base!!”

At this time, the officers that kept quiet began saying

“T-that’s right…… We should return”

“We also need to hold the Lieutenant General’s funeral.”

“In the first place, it is the First Imperial Army’s role to protect the empire.”

Altina fell silent and unhappily frowned. Regis sighed.

“Looks like you really can’t make it……”

“Weakling.”

“Nope, it’s just that scary.”

“That terrifying High Britannia Army…!!

“It can’t be help, Your Highness. There isn’t anything more dangerous than bringing soldiers who lost their will into battle.”

“I know that.”

Which was why they gave them two choices.

Coignieres dashed out of the tent.

“I will go tell the soldiers about the news of returning to base! It’s likely there will be deserters tonight. If I inform them now, it would prevent that from happening!”

That’s right, let’s just do that. The other officers also agreed with him.

The senior officers began walking out of the tent.

Regis and Altina also left since it was meaningless to stay.

What was unexpected was that the officers stood still outside.

The one facing them was a soldier.

A man with large build.

He was topless and had muscles that looked like armour. His chest, shoulders and arm was bandaged. Even though his head was bandaged, from the silhouette, he seemed to have only lost his left ear which was bloodying the bandages.

Just how many bullets did he took?

“Did you hear that?”

“What are you trying to do?”

After Coignieres’ questioning, the soldier reported his name.

“I’m Ducasse, a farmer from some village.”

“Hmph, a militia looking for his superiors, what is it?”

“Is it true that we are escaping back to base?”

“Escaping…… This is a tactical retreat! A militia like you won’t be able to understand. It is difficult to continue fighting in such a terrible state. In the first place, it’s the First Imperial Army’s role to protect the nation! Furthermore, thirty thousand reserves are rushing over there!”

After knowing his opponent was a militia, Coignieres’ gloomy face had become arrogant once more.

Ducasse brushed aside him.

“Ahh…… Isn’t the Seventh Imperial Army the strongest in the plains? Weren’t you guys boasting about it before the battle? Only to become like a tattered rag…… Thirty thousand behind us? What did the Seventh Imperial Army with twenty thousand even accomplished?!!”

“L,like I said… I-it can’t be helped!! No one know how strong their weapons are!”

“Ha! Because of that, what are you going to do upon returning to the east?! Would the High Britannia Army return after attacking the capital?! Won’t they move to the East after that?! Furthermore, there is still Estaburg there. With another enemy you couldn’t defeat joining in, can you even protect the eastern borders?!”

“Ke…… Then… You can charge them by yourself! The enemy is at the hill enroute to the capital! You should be satisfied after attacking alone and dying!”

“Stop speaking nonsense! If that’s the case, can you even protect my hometown?! If you soldiers could protect it, I will go attack the enemy now! Regardless of how many people and bullets come after me! Everyone… Everyone… because of people like you, they died!! Because of trashes like you!”

Towards Ducasse use of words, Coignieres’ face redden.

“You, how dare you…… For a mere militia, you need to be aware of your standing! Insulting a knight?!”

Coignieres’ hand was grabbing the sword hilt.

And drew the sword.

The officers who stood still behind Coignieres took a step back.

The soldiers around them also straighten their backs.

Reflecting the rays of the setting sun, the silver sword gave off a red glow. Coignieres’ killing intent was real.

However, Ducasse did not have any fear.

“Heha, are you going to kill me? That’s fine, after all I should have died earlier! However, would this protect my hometown?”

“What?!”

“My wife, my fourth child who would be born in July. My three children. They are still waiting for me back home…… Would the officers here really able to protect them?! If you can, I’m willing to give you my life no matter how many lives I have! Come, cut me down!”

His hands were wide open.

Tears were flowing nonstop.

Ducasse had already broke into tears.

“Exactly what should be done…… You are soldiers…… Please protect our home …… Isn’t the empire strong…… Please protect… my family…”

“Uuh uh uh…”

“Can’t we win against High Britannia Army——?!!”

Ducasse shouted out sadly.

Coignieres rebuked back.

“How can we win! That! That kind of army! Those weapons! We lost! This battle, the empire lost——!!”

“No…… I think we can win though.”

It became silent once more.

Ducasse looked over with his red eyes.

Coignieres and the other senior officers turned their head. They had faces in which showed that they do not believe it.

The soldiers around them also looked at them.

Only Altina who was beside him was thinking this was normal.

Regis lowered his head.

“Actually…… I would said it is possible if the Seventh Imperial Army was willing to help us.”

“You!!”

The one who let out a trembling voice was Ducasse.

Regis was shaken by it.

“Y-yes…?”

“Is it true?! Can you… really win…… and protect my hometown?!”

“Well, at the very least, until the High Britannia Army retreats. However, I can’t say the same for the countries in the east……”

“—!!”

Ducasse ran over.

He ran as if almost want to knock Coignieres off flying.

In front of Regis, the man knelt down. Ducasse was clasping his hands together as if praying to god.

“Please! please! Please help me! My family…! My children!”

“O-okay……”

After hearing the word ‘children’, Regis suddenly remembered his two nephews

*If this goes on, the High Britannia Army would be close to Rouen*

Altina rested her hand on the militia’s shoulder.

“All of you are the citizens of the Empire! In that case, we will strive our best to protect you and your family! Which is why, please lend me your strength!”

“Ah……”

Then again, the soldiers of Seventh Imperial Army did not know anything about her. At best, she was just some maid or something. After all, she was a young girl that had yet to come of age in the battlefield.

The crimson-eyed girl puffed her chest out.

“I am the commander of the Beilschmidt Border Regiment, Belgaria’s princess, Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria! And this person beside me is my strategist, Regis Auric!”

Pak, pak. Regis’ shoulder was slapped.

They were in the spotlight all of the sudden.

While the soldiers did not know her appearance, they still heard of her heroic deeds.

It was the commander and her strategist who conquered the impregnable Fort Volk with a small force. Furthermore, it was the Beilschmidt Border Regiment who helped the Seventh Imperial Army escaped in the battle of Lafressange .

Coignieres came running with his sword in hand.

“D-do not speak randomly! Lies! This person is lying! If we can obtain victory, then why did we not get it today?! Even though you were only behind us watching!!”

“That’s because it was Lieutenant General Barguesonne’s order!”

Altina replied.

Coignieres was a young knight, but looking at his speech, he looked just like a child throwing a tantrum.

Regis tried to mediate between the two.

“That… It’s true that we can win. This isn’t something based on confidence, but I really know a method to do so.”

“Liar!”

With a sword in hand, the knight yelled like a mad dog——

Altina stared at him sharply.

“Silence, Coignieres. You, didn’t you say something like ‘*you’re just a militia*’ earlier? Although I do not wish to say it…… But from my standing, aren’t you ‘just a knight’?”

“Ugh……?!”

Being said that by Altina who was a royalty, Coignieres could not say anything.

Regis used a calm voice and explained.

“Since we just lost in a battle… It can’t be help that you can’t suppress your emotions. However, we still need to discuss properly about the essential problems calmly…… Then, can I explain my method of winning against High Britannia Army?”

Coignieres quieten down.

While Ducasse nodded.

“Then…… If I’m too specific, it might be leaked to the enemy and I would be troubled by that. So I’ll be simplifying it.”

Regis took something out from his pocket which was lead-coloured.

It was only as big as a fingertip.

“This here… is High Britannia’s bullet for their guns.

Ducasse and the other soldiers had disgusted faces. That was because the small thing caused them to lose many of their comrades.

“This ammunition was made from metal, well, compared to the guns, this bullet…… The technology to produce this is next generation. If we are talking about mass-producing it, it would be using the stamping press and metallic plates…”

“Wait, Regis, speak simpler!”

In the midst of his explanation, Altina who was the impatient interrupted.

Regis scratched his head.

“Well… This is the enemy’s weakness. Something this complicated is definitely something they cannot produce here. So they are reliant on the supplies from their country. For example, if they were in a stalemate, they would be lacking ammunitions and other resources. We also had information about their guns. Compared to the old models, their guns would be more prone to wear and tear…… That goes the same to the ten thousand unit that stayed in Chainboule…… While we did not know why they were there, it became apparent after thinking about it.. That was to protect their supply line. Not just the ammunitions for gun, even the shells for their cannons is the same. If they are drawn into a long-term war, then that was necessary.”

Ducasse opened his mouth.

“W-wait a moment! Long-term war?! Is it possible?! Just looking at today, aren’t we defeated that easily?!”

“In the first place, if we were going to be defensive, we should be defending at our base. Furthermore, the place we should be attacking was their supply lines.”

*It’s better to explain it more simple.* Regis thought.

“While the High Britannia Army is strong, their weapons are more reliant on the supply lines than us. In short, if we cut their supply line, they would have no choice but to return to their country.”

Coignieres interjected the conversation.

“There’s still ten thousand at the harbour, isn’t it? In the end, we can’t win!”

“That’s not necessary true…”

“Eh?!”

The man who just stood up had fallen once more.

Regis smiled.

“We will give up attacking on land and attack them in the sea… .. Without their supply ships, their supply line would naturally stop.”

Ducasse supported his waist and his eyes widened in shock.

While Coignieres was not relieved at all.

Even the senior officers were feeling troubled.

The other soldiers were whispering things like “The sea?”,”Supply ships?” or “Is it possible?”

Altina tilted her head.

“I never went to the sea before. But, didn’t the Empire’s navy lost? Can we really do something to High Britannia’s supply ships, Regis?”

“Hee, there isn’t a problem…… What I do know are stories of how powerful fleet failed. If I put them end to end, there would be enough stories to cross the ocean.

アルティーナも5巻なんですね。
読んでくださってありがとうございます!
第1巻の作業がまだ最近のことのように感じます…。

thank you!

個人的にもとても続きが楽しみなのでぜひむらさきさんのがんばりに期待してます…!

担当の和田さん、
今回もバタバタとしてしまい…すみません…。
胃に穴をあけさせないように精進します。
お2人とも大変おつかれさまでした。
そして今後ともよろしくお願いします。

ありがとうございました。

Himesuz